

# EXHIBIT A

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HEADLINE: Bombing repeats the message sent by trade center explosion

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BODY:

The rules of international terrorism have changed.

Terrorists seemed to share an unwritten understanding that American targets abroad were fair game but not those in the United States itself.

No more, and terrorism experts in the United States and elsewhere say Wednesday's bombing in Oklahoma City bears the characteristics of other deadly attacks linked to Islamic militants.

It was almost an anniversary replay of the car bombing that devastated the U.S. Embassy in Beirut on April 18, 1983, killing 62 people, including 17 Americans. A suicide bomber who was part of a group of Shiite Muslim extremists drove a truck loaded with explosives into the compound.

The bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building repeated a message too many people ignored after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, said Rich Harknett, an international relations professor at the University of Cincinnati.

Terrorists have turned their sights on the United States and established networks of support groups in America to carry out their actions.

The main groups - Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Hezbollah and the Palestinian Liberation Front - share basic objectives. They want to destroy Israel and replace it with an Islamic state.

Each is backed by Iran and some do have support networks in the United States.

Some of these groups - particularly Hamas, which has been accused of using car bombs against Israeli targets - denied any connection to the bombing.

The Tampa-based Islamic Committee for Palestine was identified as an Islamic Jihad support group in last fall's PBS documentary, "Jihad in America."

Its president, Sami Al-Arian, has repeatedly denied the assertions and portrayed the program as a Zionist-driven smear campaign.

The program identified other groups in Texas and New York.

It's impossible to estimate the number of front groups organizing here, said Daniel Pipes, an expert on Syria and Islam and publisher of the journal, "Middle East Forum." "Wisps of information" about new groups appear frequently.

"They hate the West," Pipes said.

"It's been building. The networks have been expanding and this is an attractive place" to target.

The trade center bombing exposed the lack of information about such groups. El Sayyid Nosair, accused of killing Jewish extremist Meir Kahane, had plans detailing a trade center attack in his apartment in 1990. But federal investigators failed to recognize them.

Only after the bombing did they go back into the files, where they ultimately thwarted a subsequent plot to bomb the United Nations and New York's Hudson River tunnels.

Since then, law enforcement is doing a better job than some people think, Harknett said.

"The problem with counter-intelligence or counter-terrorism is you don't hear about the successes - the incidents that have been prevented," he said.

But their effectiveness is limited by current U.S. law, Pipes said.

"They can open an investigation or obtain information about groups who have or will execute a crime," he said. "That's very limiting." Information from Tribune wire services was used in this report.

NOTES: TERROR STRIKES AT HOME

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May 28, 1995

## Ties To Terrorists

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TAMPA - On the University of South Florida campus, Sami Al-Arian is an award-winning young engineering professor.

In his off hours, he presides over a nonprofit organization that helps raise money in the name of two groups that claim responsibility for bombings that have killed hundreds in Israel and around the world.

He also is the founder of a self-proclaimed think tank that, working in concert with USF, has invited suspected terrorist leaders to speak on the campus.

As president of the Tampa-based Islamic Committee for Palestine (ICP), Al-Arian also has helped bring other major terrorist leaders - including those from the Islamic Jihad and Hamas - to the United States for conferences in Chicago.

Al-Arian denies any ties with terrorists or that he has ties with any political organization. He says he supports the Palestinian cause and raises money for it and Islamic charities.

Khalil Shikaki, a former USF adjunct professor whose brother, Fathi, helped found the Islamic Jihad in 1980, worked with Al-Arian at the think tank - called the World and Islam Enterprise (WISE) - for two years. He agreed the ICP helps schools, clinics or mosques, some run by Hamas, in the Israeli-occupied territories. He said he didn't know if any of that money ended up paying for militant activities.

Israeli journalist Ronni Shaked, who has a new book out called ``Hamas'' about the terror group, calls the ICP ``a very important center'' for militant fundraising. He claimed that money going to Hamas charities frees other cash for weapons and terrorist activity.

A look at the rhetoric presented in the ICP's conferences and publications indicates the group and its leadership are aligned with militant Islamic politics. And it is clear by the group's guest list that Al-Arian is well-known in those circles.

Islamic Jihad founder Abdel Aziz-Odeh spoke at three ICP conferences. Another ICP conference featured Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, who is considered the spiritual leader of the militants who bombed the World Trade Center in 1993. Rahman is now on trial for a conspiracy to blow up New York tunnels and the United Nations.

ICP newsletters reproduced Islamic Jihad and Hamas fliers, and an ICP magazine included direct fundraising appeals on the groups' behalf.

Al-Arian refused requests for a face-to-face interview, but did answer some questions over the

telephone. He asked for questions in writing but did not respond to a registered letter.

In the limited interview with The Tampa Tribune, Al-Arian discussed one of the Islamic Jihad's and Hamas' tactics, the suicide bomb.

``When people have nowhere else to go, [when] they are being humiliated day in and day out. ... This is not an irrational action," he said.

``Islam provides to them a powerful ideology that grants peace to them and a good life in the hereafter because they were defending their land against the enemy."

For the past three years, USF has conducted business with Al-Arian's think tank, WISE. Together, they were hosts to the leader of a terrorist state and invited a Tunisian exile who plotted to overthrow his government in 1989.

Assertions that the ICP is aligned with and raises money for terrorist groups have been published in U.S. News & World Report and National Review magazines. It also was in the spotlight of a PBS documentary ``Jihad in America," which dubbed the ICP the ``primary support group in the U.S. for the Islamic Jihad."

Al-Arian has responded that those who say he supports terrorism are part of an organized Zionist scheme to defame his religion.

The ICP and WISE are virtually identical, sharing key officers, a post office box and at one time office space.

The USF-WISE contract calls for the two parties to co-host lectures, jointly train students and share libraries.

USF President Betty Castor, Interim Provost Michael Kovac and Middle East studies committee chairman Mark Orr said in interviews that they didn't know about WISE's shared leadership with the ICP.

Three WISE officials - Al-Arian among them - also are among the six registered officers of ICP's corporate parent organization. Those three, Al-Arian, Ramadan Abdullah and Mazin Al-Najjar, are all USF faculty members as well. Abdullah and Al-Najjar teach part time.

Castor and Kovac did not assume their present roles until early 1994, two years after the contract was signed. Although it named one of USF's faculty as a prime terrorist supporter, Castor and Orr said they have not seen the documentary. Kovac said he only saw parts of it.

Among the speakers invited to USF under the WISE agreement are two people the United States considers terrorist leaders. One, exiled Tunisian Rashid el-Ghanoushi, was refused a visa by the State Department.

The other, Hassan Turabi, who did come, is generally considered the real leader of the Sudanese government, although he holds no official position. The United States considers Sudan a training ground for terrorists.

``Anybody who brings in Hassan Turabi is supporting terrorists," said Oliver ``Buck" Revell, the FBI's former top counterterrorist official, now retired and working as a security consultant.

Al-Arian did it twice, once at USF and once at the annual ICP conference. Those meetings, held in a

Chicago hotel ballroom from 1989-92, amounted to a militant all-star team.

Besides Turabi, Odeh, Rahman and Ghanoushi, Mohammed Sakr, one of Hamas' leaders, also made an appearance.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center, a privately supported organization known for research into neo-Nazi movements and tracking Nazi war criminals, complained to the U.S. State and Justice departments that the 1989 ICP conference was a ``who's who of radical Islamic fundamentalism."

Wiesenthal Center founder Marvin Hier wrote to the agencies asking why such people were allowed into the country. Two months later, the State Department wrote back saying, in essence, it didn't know.

SH: `Palestine is ours'

A Wiesenthal Center researcher, who asked not to be named, said he attended four ICP conferences. At each one, a map of Israel was displayed. Its borders were defined by photographs of Palestinians killed fighting Israeli occupation, he said. The Arabic text below it said ``Palestine is ours as witnessed by our martyrs."

The researcher said he monitored the ICP convention because of the powerful militant leaders invited and that he continues occasional undercover work with similar groups and neo-Nazis.

``I heard time and time again in the conferences, `The Zionist entity is the dagger in the heart of the Muslim world and must be eradicated,' " the researcher said.

At the 1989 meeting, according to an ICP summary, Odeh added, ``This dagger serves as the front line of confrontation between Islam and ... the West."

An ICP brochure adds: ``The Zionist scheme in Palestine is the nucleus of the Western attack upon the Islamic homeland."

In most meetings, Al-Arian served as a moderator and host, the researcher said. ``I don't think there's any question he sets the agenda."

Al-Arian said the ICP emphasizes Islamic education, charity and social awareness.

ICP officials won't say how much money they've raised or how it was spent. Because it's considered a religious group by the Internal Revenue Service, the ICP doesn't have to file public disclosure forms like other nonprofits.

But Shaked said many people who donate to groups like the ICP believe they are serving the charitable needs the group's literature describes, and aren't usually aware of any other use.

Those social services allow Hamas doctrine to permeate Palestinian society in Israeli-occupied territories, he said.

Shaked said Israeli police and military officers learned of U.S.-based support from the ICP and other similar groups from arrestees during the intifada, an uprising of young Palestinians against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip that began in 1987.

Steven Emerson, producer of last fall's ``Jihad in America" documentary, said he has documented flows of money from the ICP to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. While much of it goes to charities,

he said, it also goes to terrorist cells.

Emerson said he has copies of checks sent by the ICP to charities which he said underwrite militant action in the occupied territories.

His documentary cited unnamed federal law enforcement sources on the ICP's links to Middle East terrorism. It also identified Odeh as an unindicted co-conspirator in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

``Jihad in America" included audio and videotape of militant Islamists meeting in the United States and urging followers to direct their anger against the United States and Israel.

The documentary presents a voice it said is Odeh, speaking to the 1989 ICP conference: ``Today Allah brings the Jews back to Palestine after these many centuries, to their mass graveyard."

Odeh has made at least one visit to the north Tampa mosque led by Al-Arian, Emerson said. But in the documentary, Al-Arian told Emerson he couldn't remember whether Odeh had been to Tampa.

Al-Arian called Emerson a Zionist agent bent on smearing Islam through a documentary full of lies.

``I don't call it `Jihad in America,' " he said. ``I call it `Jihad, Lies and Videotape.' "

SH: A busy schedule

Emerson's response: ``It is a false and totally fabricated charge that we're talking about Muslims in general. These charges were made about terrorists, not about Islam."

Emerson has won several major investigative reporting awards, and ``Jihad in America" won this year's Polk Award for journalistic excellence.

He also authored an article in the June 12 New Republic, published this week, and plans a book on the subject.

Al-Arian's background is unclear. Immigration papers contained in his personnel file show he was an Egyptian citizen when he came to USF in 1986. On one form, he initially wrote ``Palestinian," but that was crossed off.

Al-Arian, 37, earned his doctorate in engineering from North Carolina State University in 1986 and came to USF to teach computer science and engineering.

His academic work at the university has won honors. He was one of eight engineering professors given \$5,000 raises in 1994 under a new state program to reward outstanding undergraduate teaching.

That happened despite a busy schedule of outside work. Besides leading the ICP and having founded WISE, he leads the Islamic Community of Tampa, based at the north Tampa mosque, and the Islamic Academy of Florida, a private school on mosque property, state records show.

Al-Arian reserved rooms at Chicago's McCormick Center Hotel for the 1990 conference by using his USF Computer Science and Engineering office as a return address.

Emerson said the ICP's own publications and actions, overseen by Al-Arian, are the most compelling proof linking it to the Islamic Jihad.

An ICP promotional brochure said the group ``contributes to the support of the Palestinian people's struggle and defiance in their occupied land."

An ICP newsletter, ``Islam and Palestine," has included Islamic Jihad communiques. The newsletter reflected the Islamic Jihad's point of view, according to assessments by Khalil Shikaki and a 1994 book, ``Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza," by Bir Zeit University professor Ziad Abu-Amr.

When it ceased publication around 1991, ``Islam and Palestine" carried two return addresses - one in Cyprus, and the other the same north Tampa post office box used then and now by the WISE think-tank.

Al-Arian said the newsletter was printed overseas and distributed by the ICP in the United States as a way to keep people informed about the intifada.

``As far as we're concerned, this is a magazine that came out of Europe," Al-Arian said. ``We didn't have access to any other magazines that presented Islamic points of view in the intifada explaining what is going on."

But ``Islam and Palestine" also carried notices of ICP conferences.

SH: Joint responsibility

Al-Arian also is listed as the editor-in-chief in ``Inquiry," a glossy, infrequently published magazine that called itself an ``intellectual view to the Muslim and an Islamic Perspective to the intellect." Like ``Islam and Palestine," ``Inquiry" also shared the same post office box with the ICP and WISE.

It included a disclaimer that views expressed were not necessarily the ICP's. Articles solicited contributions for the Islamic Jihad and Hamas.

In its March 1992 issue, an essay supporting the intifada by Shujaat Ali Khan warned against the consequences of a budding peace process.

``The Muslim rulers must fear Allah and not the United States or its surrogates," Ali Khan wrote. ``Muslims all over the world have a joint responsibility to provide financial and material support to the intifada and the Islamic movements; namely Islamic Jihad for Palestine and Hamas."

A June 1993 article said the World Trade Center bombing was committed by ``Zionist forces" as part of a ``high-intensity propaganda war" to discredit Muslims.

In an interview, Al-Arian dissociated himself from the Islamic Jihad and Hamas, but questioned whether it is fair to call group members terrorists.

Their attacks are justified when they target soldiers, he said.

``My understanding from what I read about them [is] their targets are basically military. I categorically condemn anything against civilians," he said.

But civilians are frequent victims. A suicide bomber killed 21 Israelis at a bus stop in January; another bomb killed 23 Tel Aviv commuters on a bus in October. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for one, Hamas for the other.



American student Alisa Flatow, killed in the April 9 suicide bombing of an Israeli bus in the Gaza Strip, was an accidental victim, Al-Arian said.

``That's what her father said. She was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I feel bad about it."

ICP political activities have slowed since the intifada, Al-Arian said. His efforts now are focused on the local Muslim community.

``One hundred percent of my spare time [is devoted] to the school and the good of the community."

Emerson believes the ICP is not as powerful as it was two years ago. Financial support has dried up and the group has been surpassed by other U.S.-based support networks, including one in Texas linked to Hamas.

But he still sees reason for concern.

``The issue is any extremist group with its headquarters in your community," he said. ``It serves as a magnet for radicals coming in."

(CHART) (C) The connection

The University of South Florida is part of a web of connections involving a USF professor and two Tampa organizations that have brought Islamic radicals into the United States and Tampa.

Sami Al-Arian

A tenured associate professor in engineering and computer science at the University of South Florida. Leads the Tampa-based Islamic Committee for Palestine and Al-Qassem Mosque. Incorporated the World and Islam Studies Enterprise Inc., a Tampa-based think tank affiliated with USF.

He is leader of:

Al-Qassem Mosque

North Tampa mosque named for Izzadin Al-Qassem, a martyr to Islamic Jihad and considered father of armed Palestinian nationalism. The terror group Hamas has a brigade named for Al-Qassem.

He is founder of:

World and Islam Studies Enterprise Inc. (WISE)

Founded in 1991 in Temple Terrace as a think tank on Arab and Muslim academic developments. Under a 1992 agreement, conducts joint academic programs with USF. Three WISE members are on the state payroll as USF teachers.

WISE shares P.O. Box with:

Islamic Committee for Palestine (ICP)

Described as a charitable organization, but identified by experts as part of a U.S. support network for terrorist groups. Brought Islamic Jihad leaders and other militants to U.S. conferences. Shares post office box and personnel, and formerly shared office space, with WISE.

Sami Al-Arian is Editor of:

``Inquiry"

As Islamic magazine published occasionally by the ICP, edited by Al-Arian. A disclaimer says its views are not necessarily the ICP's. It seeks contributions for the Islamic Jihad and Hamas.

Sami Al-Arian is Publisher of:

``Islam and Palestine"

ICP newsletter that carried Islamic Jihad communiques and interviews with its leaders. 1989-91 issues include return addresses in Cyprus and at the ICP / Wise Tampa post office box.

These publications supported or solicited donations to the Islamic Jihad and Hamas.

A radical ``Who's Who"

These four militant islamists were brought into the U.S. by one or both of these organizations (ICP and WISE).

Hassan Turabi

A Western-educated lawyer considered the power behind the militant Sudanese government; intellectual leader in the Islamic revival effort. Spoke to WISE and USF's Middle East studies committee in 1992. Attended ICP's 1990 Chicago conference.

Abdel Aziz-Odeh

Spiritual leader and a founder of the Islamic Jihad. The PBS documentary ``Jihad in America" identified him as an unindicted co-conspirator in the World Trade Center bombing. Frequent speaker at ICP conferences. Visited mosque, according to documentary producer Steven Emerson.

Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman

Blind Egyptian cleric accused of conspiring to bomb New York landmarks including the UN and major traffic tunnels. Four followers convicted of bombing the World Trade Center are believed to have acted at his behest. Spoke at the ICP's 1991 Chicago conference.

Rashid el-Ghanoushi

Tunisian exile, living in England, convicted of plotting to kill the Tunisian president in 1989. The State Department has refused him a visa for a standing speaking invitation from WISE and USF's Middle East studies committee. Spoke at 1989 and 1990 ICP conferences.

Sources: Tribune research, ``Jihad in America" documentary, University of South Florida Committee for Middle East Studies. Tribune graphic

**This story can be found at:** <http://news.tbo.com/news/MGA906AYECD.html>

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May 28, 1995

## Terror Law Cuts Rights, Arabs Say

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TAMPA - Supporters of President Clinton's proposed Omnibus Counterterrorism Act say it will strengthen their ability to fight terrorism, but many Arab-Americans fear that it will limit their rights and target them for harassment.

While concern over terrorism has grown in the wake of the 1993 World Trade Center attack and last month's Oklahoma City bombing, law enforcement experts said the government is stuck with limited anti-terrorism abilities.

Federal law requires proof of a crime or a plot to commit a crime before any federal investigation can start. That's often why, as in the case of activists working at the University of South Florida, people can be linked to terrorist activity by journalists long before the authorities start investigating.

Clinton's bill, if it passes, would change that by granting agents new power to monitor and infiltrate suspected terrorist groups and adding 1,000 new federal workers to focus on counterterrorism.

Many Arab-Americans say they already are stereotyped and that the law would make a difficult matter worse.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department is expected to reinterpret its wiretapping and surveillance guidelines to give federal agents more latitude. Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh are working on the changes.

Clinton proposed the new law in January following the suicide bombing of an Israeli bus stop that killed 21 people. Saying the attack was meant to quash ongoing peace talks between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, he froze domestic assets of 12 terrorist groups and 18 terrorist leaders.

"The government needs the ability to deal with the technological challenges presented by terrorism," Clinton said May 8. "This legislation does it, and there is simply no reason to delay it."

All these proposals, however, alarm some civil libertarians, who fear the return of abuses of power during the tenure of former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Revelations of those policies, including a domestic spy network, spawned the 1974 Privacy Act that currently blocks the FBI from keeping files on groups that are not formally under investigation.

Many Arab-Americans have joined civil libertarians in fighting the bill. Current law already allows law enforcement to monitor possible terror groups and their supporters, said Aslam Abdullah, editor of The Minaret, a monthly Islamic magazine based in Los Angeles. The magazine is an offshoot of the Los Angeles Islamic community, one of the nation's largest and most moderate.

Abdullah is most concerned with the bill's provision allowing expedited deportations of immigrants suspected of supporting terrorism. Law enforcement officials, Abdullah said, wouldn't have to prove their suspicions, an opportunity ripe for abuse of power.

While Abdullah said he supports fighting terrorism, he calls the debate surrounding the bill another example of finger-pointing at American Muslims.

Officials of the Islamic Committee for Palestine (ICP) also claim fingers are pointed at them because they are Muslims.

The uncertainty surrounding who is and is not a terrorist or terrorist sympathizer has made estimating the number of U.S.-based organizations supporting terrorist groups difficult, said Oliver ``Buck'' Revell, the FBI's former director of counterterrorism.

ICP is one such group, counterterrorism experts said. ICP publications printed communiques and carried fundraising appeals for Islamic Jihad and Hamas, two of the Middle East's most deadly terrorist groups.

An award-winning PBS documentary produced by Steven Emerson that ran in November also called ICP the Islamic Jihad's primary U.S. support network. Revell said the current law allows journalists more freedom in investigating groups like ICP than the government.

Mainstream Muslim groups, however, don't think the government should take the word of journalists, such as Emerson, who have ``anti-Muslim sentiments," Abdullah said.

ICP, Abdullah said, is a charity that contributes to humanitarian causes such as hospitals and orphanages.

FBI officials won't say whether they are investigating ICP or a related academic group, the World and Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE).

But there are some indications that FBI agents have checked on the groups. In 1992, an agent asked postal officials about a WISE post office box, according to Temple Terrace city records. And an FBI agent asked Dan Berman, director of the USF chapter of Hillel, about militant Muslim activity on campus last fall. Hillel is a religious and social organization serving Jewish students.

**This story can be found at:** <http://news.tbo.com/news/MGA28Q2YECD.html>

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May 28, 1995

## Extremist Groups Agree On Goals

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TAMPA - On the same day in April, two suicide bombers struck in the Gaza Strip. One crashed into a bus, the other into a military convoy. Seven Israelis and one American college student lay dead.

One bomber died for Islamic Jihad, the other for Hamas.

While most Americans consider all Middle Eastern extremist groups the same, they have significant differences, experts say.

Both extremist groups have claimed responsibility or been blamed for a variety of deadly terrorist attacks over the past 15 years. Now they say they want to disrupt peace talks between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, destroy Israel and replace it with a single Muslim state ultimately spanning the Middle East.

Hamas is larger and better organized than the Islamic Jihad, said Hooshang Amirahmadi, director of Rutgers University's Middle East Studies program.

Hamas' charter emphasizes religious education for Palestinians, the people who trace their ancestry to much of what is now Israel, the occupied West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jordan.

Hamas has built social and medical services where few existed in the occupied territories, which has helped win the hearts and minds of many Palestinians.

At the same time, it has engaged in terrorism and is considered one of the driving forces behind the Palestinian intifada - or uprising - against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In contrast to Hamas' social service work, Islamic Jihad focuses almost exclusively on terrorist attacks, said Amirahmadi, a native of Iran.

Jihad leaders claim responsibility for suicide bombers who killed 28 Israelis this year - 21 at a bus stop in January and seven more on a bus April 9.

As Hamas increases its terrorist activity, experts say, it is becoming more like Islamic Jihad.

Both organizations have their roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, an older, more-established group that promotes Islam in government and society throughout the Middle East.

But the Brotherhood advocated delaying violence against Israel and secular Arab states until the masses were thoroughly steeped in Islamic thought.

Frustration with the Brotherhood's plodding tactics led younger Palestinians to form Islamic Jihad in 1980, Amirahmadi said. Hamas emerged during the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories in the late 1980s.

While Hamas fights the Israeli government, the Israelis helped foster its growth. Israel saw Hamas as a challenger to the PLO, which had yet to renounce terrorism or recognize Israel's right to exist.

Although the PLO now rules the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho, many Palestinians there remain fervently opposed to Israel. They've become willing volunteers for the extremist groups operating in the territories Israel seized from Egypt and Jordan during the 1967 war.

Palestinians in Israeli-occupied territory have few rights, said Mark Tessler, a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee expert in Middle East politics. That life fuels the anger that drives militant groups.

**This story can be found at:** <http://news.tbo.com/news/MGA9IX5YECD.html>

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May 28, 1995

## Terms Fail To Separate Religion And Politics

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TAMPA - Americans unfamiliar with Islam often call groups like the Islamic Jihad and Hamas "fundamentalist," but many Muslims say the term creates more confusion than understanding.

Fundamentalism, some Islamic scholars say, means a disciplined observance of the Koran's law, not politics.

True fundamentalists would not resort to violence, said Khalil Shikaki, director of the Center for Palestinian Research at the West Bank's An Najah University.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad are political movements, Shikaki said, that use religion to back up their political goals. He calls their tactics ``political Islam."

``Political Islam is more about finding answers to real-life problems facing Muslims. It's not necessarily always extreme," said Shikaki, who is a Muslim. ``Those who advocate violence are not the majority of us involved in political Islam."

``Jihad" is another hot-button word in Islam.

Some Muslims argue that jihad ``should be understood in a moral and spiritual, rather than a military, sense," Bernard Lewis, an expert on Arab culture, wrote in his 1988 book ``The Political Language of Islam."

Moderate Muslims bridle at the use of jihad solely to mean holy war. But radical Muslims use the word in a military sense, and Western governments and news organizations have followed suit. And, Lewis writes, ``the overwhelming majority" of Muslim theologians and jurists do, too.

Semantics aside, groups like the Islamic Jihad and Hamas win support from some Palestinians because they use religion to empower people who feel impotent, said Hooshang Amirahmadi, director of Rutgers University's Middle East Studies program.

``Islam is a key," he said. ``It's where they find refuge, a sense of pride and independence and identity that they felt was missing."

**This story can be found at:** <http://news.tbo.com/news/MGAK6ECYECD.html>

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May 29, 1995

## USF Sees Academic Freedom Where Others See Poor Security

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TAMPA - The United States government considers them terrorists. But the University of South Florida considered them foreign intellectuals welcome on campus.

As part of what one USF professor called the pursuit of academic freedom, USF officials sought a visa in 1993 for an exiled Tunisian convicted of trying to overthrow his government and kill its president.

They also invited a militant Sudanese power broker to speak on campus.

``That's the function of a university, to know about the world, the people influencing the world," said Mark Orr, director of USF's International Affairs Center and chairman of its Committee for Middle East Studies. ``It's a matter of keeping aware of existing or emerging world problems."

The U.S. State Department says the two people USF invited to speak know about world problems because they are causing them.

The invitations were made in partnership with the Tampa-based World and Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE), which describes itself as a think tank on Muslim religious and political issues.

School officials, including President Betty Castor, asked few questions about WISE leader and USF engineering professor Sami Al-Arian, even after an award-winning PBS documentary in November identified him as head of the Islamic Jihad terrorist group's domestic support network.

Al-Arian denies any connection to terrorists. He says he supports the Palestinian cause and raises money for it and Islamic charities.

Al-Arian is listed as editor-in-chief of a magazine published by the Islamic Committee for Palestine. The magazine includes articles that solicit money for the Islamic Jihad and Hamas, two international terrorist groups.

Records show Al-Arian founded WISE in 1991 and also list him as president of the Islamic Committee for Palestine. The two groups share two other officers, a post office box and once shared office space.

Castor said she didn't become aware of the university's 1992 agreement with WISE - which precedes her presidency by two years - until the The Tampa Tribune asked about it in April. She said it is among dozens of partnerships with outside groups intended to enrich the university and the community. Similar agreements are common throughout the country.

Whether WISE has connections to a foreign terrorist organization is beyond the school's ability to determine, Castor said.

``I think we have an obligation to look into it and we are," she said.

A review of the USF-WISE contract that Castor requested last month addresses only two issues - whether WISE has lived up to its commitment to recruit and provide stipends to some graduate students and why USF pays WISE for an Arabic class taught by a WISE/ICP official.

WISE spent \$16,000 during the past two years to underwrite graduate student costs at USF, inspector general Michael Peppers' report said.

In each case, Peppers' memorandum, completed Wednesday, requests more investigation.

The 1992 agreement also calls for the two to co-sponsor programs and share library resources.

Castor agreed with Orr that it is a university's obligation to learn about the world and seek out controversial, even offensive viewpoints. The WISE agreement does that, she said, and has resulted in only a few controversial invitations.

SH: National security issues

But those critical of the agreement between WISE and USF say it raises questions about national security.

The university shouldn't lend credibility to those who support terrorism, said L. Paul Bremer, a career State Department official who was ambassador at large for counterterrorism from 1986-89.

``Margaret Thatcher once said that publicity is the oxygen on which terrorists survive," Bremer said. ``Anytime you give those people publicity ... one is basically giving them a form of support."

The State Department considers some of the people USF and WISE invited to campus to be key terrorist leaders.

In 1992, Hassan Turabi spoke to a campus conference of about 25 professors from USF and other American universities. Turabi is considered the behind-the-scenes leader of Sudan's hard-line Islamic regime, which the U.S. State Department says sponsors terrorism.

In the fall of 1993, USF's Committee for Middle East Studies and WISE issued an invitation to Rashid el-Ghanoushi, an exiled Tunisian convicted of trying to overthrow his government and kill its president.

Ghanoushi never got to campus. The State Department refused him a visa.

``If we consider that he participated in terrorist activity, then he won't get a visa," Gary Sheaffer, spokesman for the Bureau of Consular Affairs, said last year.

But USF officials tried to persuade the government to let Ghanoushi in, invoking the principle of academic freedom in letters to Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Some see the invitations as reckless, and wonder what USF, a school with little national reputation in Middle Eastern studies, is trying to accomplish.

SH: 'Jihad University?'

``The United States government won't talk to people it considers terrorists," said Martin Kramer, a terrorism expert and associate director of Tel Aviv University's Moshe Dayan Center. ``The question is whether academe should. Is this the reputation we want? Jihad University?"

Both Turabi and Ghanoushi addressed Al-Arian's ICP conventions in Chicago before being invited to speak at USF.

Castor defended the school's links with WISE, saying no WISE officials have been accused of any crime or violated any university policy.

She and other USF officials said they weren't aware of any connection between WISE and the ICP.

Orr said he also was unaware of Al-Arian's connections to WISE, even though Al-Arian was one of those who negotiated the WISE-USF agreement.

Michael Kovac, interim USF provost and engineering dean, said he asked Al-Arian about the documentary that labeled Al-Arian a key player in U.S. militant circles.

``He felt the program was a setup ... taken out of context," Kovac said.

Kovac said he hasn't seen the documentary. ``I think I saw parts of it" after speaking with Al-Arian, he said.

The agreement hasn't cost USF much, records show. The university did not pay to bring in Turabi, and it uses small donations from faculty members and community supporters to pay for luncheons held for the groups' meetings.

``Our long-term goal is to contribute to the understanding of the revivalist Islamist trends, misleadingly labeled 'fundamentalist' in Western and American academic circles," WISE director Ramadan Abdullah said in a written 1993 introduction to Turabi's visit to USF.

Abdullah first said he would talk with the Tribune, then canceled an interview. He didn't respond to telephone messages to reschedule and wouldn't accept a certified letter seeking an interview for this story.

WISE brochures list four Tampa men, including Al-Arian and Abdullah, as representatives or executives of WISE.

Al-Arian, Abdullah and Mazin Al-Najjar are also among the six corporate officers of the Islamic Concern Project, the corporate parent of the Islamic Committee for Palestine, records show.

At one time, WISE and the ICP also shared office space in a house and nearby condominium in Raintree Lakes, a Temple Terrace subdivision.

In the early 1990s, neighbors complained to city officials that the organizations operating in the residentially zoned neighborhood violated zoning laws.

City police investigated, after zoning officials got conflicting accounts about how the house was being used.

A Sept. 18, 1991, police report cites Al-Arian as saying the house was being used for offices. A

year later, however, he wrote a letter to Temple Terrace code enforcement officials saying, ``I assure you that there [is] no business at this residence."

When detectives visited the house, they found computers, books and fliers, including fundraising material for an organization named the Muslim Women Society - an ICP affiliate.

Today, WISE's office is in a strip office complex at 5620 E. Fowler Ave., two miles east of campus. But its name isn't on the strip center's sign, and its telephone number is not published.

On his resume, Abdullah lists himself as having been WISE's administrative director in Tampa since 1990, even though WISE was not incorporated by Al-Arian until 1991.

Abdullah and Al-Najjar of WISE are both on the state payroll as adjunct - or part-time - USF professors.

Abdullah, who holds a doctorate in Islamic and Middle East economics from the University of Durham in Great Britain, teaches politics of the Middle East.

Al-Najjar has a doctorate in engineering, but teaches Arabic. USF pays Al-Najjar's \$2,000-per-semester salary directly to WISE, university records show. USF officials said they don't know why.

It isn't clear why WISE is based in Tampa, which isn't known as a center for Islamic culture. But it could be because of Al-Arian's presence. Al-Najjar's resume shows that he followed Al-Arian to Tampa in 1986.

He was a doctoral student in engineering at North Carolina State with Al-Arian, his resume shows. When Al-Arian graduated and was hired by USF as an assistant professor, Al-Najjar transferred to USF, where he completed his doctorate in 1993.

USF established its link with WISE through the Committee for Middle East Studies, founded in 1991 at the request of faculty members, Orr said.

The committee's main work has been sponsoring academic meetings and publishing occasional papers. It considered WISE staffers scholars worthy of inclusion in joint projects, Orr said.

SH: 'Jihad in America'

That didn't change in November when PBS aired ``Jihad in America," a documentary asserting links between the ICP and the Islamic Jihad.

Following the broadcast, Castor had USF officials ask campus police about any criminal activity involving Al-Arian. The police didn't know of any, she said.

USF Middle East studies committee members didn't investigate.

``That's not my job," Orr said.

An Asian specialist and director of USF's International Affairs Center, Orr said he is no Middle East expert. He considers himself a ``convener, an organizer."

``We have no special way of investigating something like that," he said of the allegations about Al-Arian, WISE and the ICP. ``It's not our problem. As far as I'm concerned, he's a bona fide member of the faculty."

Al-Arian said the documentary was false and its producer was part of a Zionist campaign to smear Islam.

The producer, Steven Emerson, is continuing his work on U.S. operations of international terrorist groups and plans a book, his fifth, on the subject. He has written about the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 and other national security issues.

Nobody at USF tried to contact him after ``Jihad in America" aired, Emerson said.

If they had, ``I certainly would have offered them a copy of the film. Free," he said. ``I would think if they were doing an investigation they would at least look at the allegations instead of just asking Sami."

Tribune researcher Buddy Jaudon contributed to this report.

**This story can be found at:** <http://news.tbo.com/news/MGASBEGYECD.html>

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May 29, 1995

## Mosque Bears Name Of Palestinian Martyr

MICHAEL FECHTER  
[mfechter@tampatrib.com](mailto:mfechter@tampatrib.com)

TAMPA - CO: CORRECTION - The Izzadin Al-Qassem Mosque in north Tampa is named for a Palestinian martyr considered the spiritual guide to militant Islamists, including Islamic Jihad founders. The name provides insight into some mosque leaders, but not necessarily its broader congregation. A Tribune story May 29 said otherwise. (06/06/95)

At first glance, the mosque at the end of 130th Street looks like any other.

Students of Middle East history, however, say its uncommon name, Masjid Al- Qassem, indicates a congregation sympathetic to the aims of Islamic militants.

Izzadin Al-Qassem was not a Koranic figure or ancient Muslim sage. Rather, he is considered a martyr to Palestinian nationalism, a Syrian killed by the British occupiers of Palestine in 1935.

Al-Qassem is an icon to members of Hamas, or Islamic Resistance Movement, and Islamic Jihad, a terrorist group founded in 1980 in one of the few other mosques named after Al-Qassem, said Ziad Abu Amr, a professor at Bir Zeit University in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

For years, the Tampa mosque had no name. But it was named after Al-Qassem in 1989, two years after newcomers to Tampa's Muslim community took the mosque over in a struggle for control that police reports show turned violent.

Those newcomers included University of South Florida faculty members Sami Al-Arian and Mazin Al-Najjar, both officers in a Tampa-based organization that supports militant Palestinian groups.

Al-Arian signed papers of incorporation for the Al-Qassem mosque and is considered its leader. He also heads the Tampa-based Islamic Committee for Palestine.

ICP publications have carried fundraising appeals for Islamic Jihad and Hamas and reproduce the organizations' fliers. ICP conferences also have featured leaders of the two militant organizations.

Al-Arian denies any terrorist connections.

Islamic studies experts say the Al-Qassem name is rare among mosques anywhere.

Before 1989, the mosque was incorporated as the Islamic Community of Tampa and had no real name. That's normal, said Aslam Abdullah, editor of The Minaret, an Islamic magazine based in Los Angeles. Most American mosques are named for their communities, Abdullah said.

Al-Arian said a committee named the mosque after Al-Qassem in 1989, two years after the schism

within the mosque. The new name also came two years after the start of the intifada, the uprising by Palestinians against Israeli occupation.

Al-Qassem, Al-Arian said, was a historical figure people admired.

`` He became a symbol in Palestine of the first to resist and fight for freedom. He was strengthened by religion and devotion to God."

Al-Arian angrily denied any other significance to the name.

`` If we were thinking of ideology or affiliating, we wouldn't make it that obvious. Are we going to be so stupid?" he asked. `` People identified with that name. We didn't know about the Gaza mosque at all."

But Al-Arian did know Abdel Aziz-Odeh, the leader of the Gaza Strip mosque named for Al-Qassem where the Islamic Jihad was founded in 1980. Odeh spoke at the 1989, '90 and '91 ICP conferences organized by Al-Arian and was named in a PBS documentary as a visitor to Al-Arian's Tampa mosque.

The mosque at 5910 E. 130th St. sits in the last house on a dead-end street near the University of South Florida.

There, a prayer service turned violent on May 8, 1987, according to a Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office report. The wife of the then-leader of the mosque suffered a miscarriage after being struck in a fight that started when 15 people interrupted a service and tried to kick out the worshippers, the report said.

Deputy Mike Darst said he doesn't remember details, but recalled the fight was a `` who-owns-the-church type thing."

During the struggle, someone tried hitting 42-year-old Magda Ahmad with a large purse, his report said. A third person absorbed the blow but bumped into Magda Ahmad, the wife of Ibrahim Ahmad, who was then the leader of the mosque. Ahmad, who was also a USF math professor, had completed his USF contract and was about to leave Tampa.

Magda Ahmad, then in her fourth month of pregnancy, suffered a miscarriage. Deputies charged Hala Al-Najjar, then 25, with aggravated battery on Ahmad, but prosecutors decided they did not have enough evidence to try the case.

Magda and Ibrahim Ahmad declined to discuss the incident. They filed suit seeking an injunction to keep Al-Arian and others named in the incident away from their homes and the mosque. But the case died after two years when the Ahmads failed to act on it, court records show.

Mazin Al-Najjar and another man listed as a suspect in the Sheriff's Office report are now officers of the mosque. But no charges were ever filed against them. Mazin Al-Najjar declined a request for an interview with The Tampa Tribune.

Mazin Al-Najjar is an engineering graduate of USF now employed by the World and Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE) think tank.

Mazin Al-Najjar also is a part-time professor of Arabic at USF and, according to state records, a registered officer of other corporations formed by Al-Arian: the Islamic Community of Tampa, which owns the mosque property; the Islamic Academy of Florida, a school located at the mosque;

and the Islamic Concern Project.

**This story can be found at:** <http://news.tbo.com/news/MGA1T8MYECD.html>

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# St. Petersburg Times

## Journalist: USF linked to terrorists; [TAMPA Edition]

JAMES HARPER. *St. Petersburg Times*. St. Petersburg, Fla.: Feb 10, 1996. pg. 4.B.5.B

### Abstract (Document Summary)

He said Palestinian advocates at USF were involved in the World Trade Center bombing in 1993.

"But they include money transfers, they include actual reservations and planning for the conspirators in the bombing, and they include visits back and forth between Tampa and New York and New Jersey, between officials here of the groups (operating at USF) and officials there."

USF has been troubled for months by accusations that one of its engineering professors might have raised money and other support for Palestinian terrorists, and that a private Islamic studies group that collaborated with USF on various activities was really more interested in spreading radical Islamic propaganda.

**Full Text** (662 words)

*Copyright Times Publishing Co. Feb 10, 1996*

A freelance journalist on the trail of international terrorists told a luncheon audience Friday that the link between the University of South Florida and terrorist activity is stronger than anyone thinks.

He said Palestinian advocates at USF were involved in the World Trade Center bombing in 1993.

"I am constrained at this point from revealing some of those details, but I can tell you they will come out in the near term," said Steven Emerson, who often bases his reports on unnamed law enforcement sources.

"But they include money transfers, they include actual reservations and planning for the conspirators in the bombing, and they include visits back and forth between Tampa and New York and New Jersey, between officials here of the groups (operating at USF) and officials there."

A USF professor who has been a target of Emerson's reporting and a former CIA official called this latest assertion ridiculous.

But Emerson, whose 1994 documentary Jihad in America was a primary source in a subsequent Tampa Tribune series that alleged USF's "Ties to Terrorists," insisted that the truth of USF's involvement will soon "come to light in a particularly embarrassing way."

USF has been troubled for months by accusations that one of its engineering professors might have raised money and other support for Palestinian terrorists, and that a private Islamic studies group that collaborated with USF on various activities was really more interested in spreading radical Islamic propaganda.

USF officials, however, have insisted that the collaboration involved nothing but legitimate academic activities, and that while they have cooperated with law enforcement agencies, they will not take action against any employee based on unofficial charges.

In an effort to clear the air, USF President Betty Castor last month asked prominent lawyer and former USF president William Reece Smith to review all of its activities involving Middle Eastern studies, engineering professor Sami Al-Arian and the private think tank, known as the World and Islam Studies Enterprise.

"Lacking any specific information about Mr. Emerson's comments," USF spokesman Dan Casseday said Friday, "it would be difficult to respond. But if he has any information to share with law enforcement agencies we encourage him to do so."

Al-Arian, whose home and offices were searched by the FBI in November after a friend and part-time USF professor emerged as the new leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, said Friday that Emerson's attempt to link him or his associates to the World Trade Center bombing is "absolutely ridiculous."

"This is ludicrous," said Vince Cannistraro, a former chief of counter-terrorism operations at the CIA who is familiar with Emerson's work. "There is no connection between Tampa and the World Trade Center bombing."

Emerson, who has been a congressional staffer and a staff writer for U.S. News and World Report, was speaking to about 220 members and guests of the Suncoast Tiger Bay Club, a luncheon group that meets regularly to hear speakers on politics and other public issues.

The issue is not just the existence of a Middle Eastern terrorist group operating in the U.S., he said. "It is the external legitimacy, the respectability, afforded these groups by academia under the guise of academic freedom."

Castor and others have said it is not the university's role to take sides in political and international disputes. Instead, a free university should be a forum where all views can be expressed and rigorously examined. But Emerson said USF and other news media, including the Times, did not take the warning signs about Al-Arian and his friends seriously enough.

Emerson said that he supports free speech but that democracy also requires good judgment, responsibility, integrity and honesty. "There will be people who abuse those principles. And it is incumbent upon us, either in the media or in the university, to expose those who violate those principles."

A Tiger Bay member asked Emerson about his own financial support. Emerson said he gets private grants by said he is careful not to take money from Israeli-backed sources.

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March 22, 1998

Section: Tropic

## THE SECRET WAR

MARTIN MERZER, Herald Staff Writer

Mazen Al-Najjar is in jail. Charges: unknown. Accusers: anonymous. Evidence: secret. Sentence: indeterminate.

Place: Cell 3, Block 4B, on the fourth floor of Manatee County's Downtown Detention Facility, which has a contract to house detainees of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Generally, detainees are kept here in Bradenton just a few days or weeks before bonding out or being deported from the country. Al-Najjar has been here since May 19, so long that even the guy who runs the place feels sorry for him.

"C'mon, counselor, get this thing moving," prison director S. Kent Dodd tells Al-Najjar's lawyer, Luis Coton of Tampa. "He's been here too long."

Absent a legal breakthrough, Al-Najjar is not going anywhere for some time.

If a Tampa newspaper and federal investigators are right, Al-Najjar -- an engineer, a part-time state college instructor, a Muslim cleric -- is a "midlevel operative" in a cabal of Palestinian terrorists or accomplices that cloistered itself in Tampa.

If they are right, this nest of zealots shrouded itself at the University of South Florida and dominated two local Arab-American organizations, exploiting them as fronts.

If they are right, the fanatics were led by Al-Najjar's brother-in-law, Sami Al-Arian, a tenured engineering professor at the university.

If they are right, Islamic Jihad and Hamas -- Mideast terrorist groups responsible for barbarous attacks on Israeli civilians, fatal bombing attacks on U.S. embassies in Kuwait and Beirut, the bombing of a Madrid restaurant that

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killed 15 Americans -- maintained a key cell of conspirators right here in sunny, subtropical Florida.

If they are right.

Middle East terrorism may or may not have found a home in Florida, but there is no doubt that Middle East intrigue now flourishes here. Nothing in this affair is purely as it seems.

Every possibility leads to a maze of others. Motives seem hazy, agendas concealed. Those driven by ideology or inexperience to seek firm conclusions may be doomed to embarrassment or worse.

Some could be learning this lesson right now, the hard way. I've seen it before. I've experienced it myself, gazing through too many cracked mirrors, the view distorted by applying Western logic to Mideast mysteries. I've learned to look not so much for answers as for tendencies, distinctions, probabilities.

I lived in the Middle East for two years, serving as The Herald's bureau chief there from October 1983 to January 1985. I returned there for the Palestinian uprising and for the Gulf War, and in the aftermath of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

And I learned. I learned that in Middle Eastern affairs, caution is well advised.

So think of this as a cautionary tale:

Muslim terrorists nestled near the Gulf of Mexico on a dead-end Tampa street a few blocks from the Taco Bell and the Shell station?

Or a downtrodden group of Palestinians, the world's castoffs, betrayed in the land of freedom, punished for expressing their beliefs, unable to achieve peace and serenity in their last refuge?

Jihad in America

Our first problem is this:

All of the evidence uncovered against both men and thus far open to public inspection has been circumstantial, at best. More than three years after the allegations originally surfaced, more than two years after the FBI raided several homes and offices, not a single formal charge has been filed in criminal court.

Nevertheless, Al-Najjar has been jailed for 10 months on secret evidence offered by unknown accusers, a situation that may seem repugnant to most Americans but is legal under INS law. His only offense: overstaying his visa by seven years, a relatively routine immigration matter that does not normally land an offender in jail -- unless someone calls him a terrorist.

His brother-in-law, Al-Arian, has been vigorously targeted by authorities, his papers seized, his phone tapped, his reputation and teaching career tattered.

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Al-Arian: ``What is it that we have done that has made these people decide they will get us through any means? What is it?

"Because we have strong advocacy for the Palestinian people, that's why they want to get us? What have we done? Everything was in the open. We didn't do anything in secret."

Al-Najjar and Al-Arian say their families and the University of South Florida, have been stigmatized by innuendo and guilt by association.

They say an unhealthy and ruinous brew is fermenting in Tampa. They say these are the ingredients of that brew:

A climate of anti-terrorist anxiety. Negative stereotypes about Arabs. Slanted journalism by the producer of a television documentary and, more troubling, a mainstream newspaper. Overzealous investigators. That unusual clause of immigration law that permits the use of secret evidence, a process conducted outside the conventional judicial system.

``I have a great confidence in the American judiciary, but so far I am shielded from the American judiciary," Al-Najjar, 40, tells me during a jailhouse interview.

A thin man, no taller than five-foot-seven, he wears a perpetually doleful look, his hazel eyes constantly searching my face for a sign of hope. Does he deserve such a sign? Has he convinced himself that he does? Is this all an act?

``This practice that took place against me is always condemned by this country. The State Department condemns this, this use of secret evidence, when it happens some place else.

``How can the government of the United States, which is supposed to be based on constitutional rights, let this happen here?"

The government says . . . pretty much nothing.

``We can only say it's an ongoing situation," says Juana Klim, a spokeswoman for the FBI's Tampa office.

Told that The Herald is preparing a major story on the affair, that this would be a good time to share even a hint of the information they think they have, even off-the-record if necessary, she and other government officials offer nothing.

``We won't even confirm there's an investigation," says Monte Richardson, an assistant U.S. attorney in Tampa.

Asked specifically about the use of secret evidence, the INS engages in circular reasoning.

``Suffice it to say we have information that's classified," says Dan Vara, the agency's district counsel in Miami. ``Our regulations say if we have information that's classified, we can use it in in camera [secret] proceedings."

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Others are less circumspect.

``The record is clear,'' says Art Teitelbaum, southern area director of the Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish group that has been monitoring events in Tampa. ``This was a front for fund raising for Arab terrorist groups, in particular Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

``It's no secret that America is an easy place for terrorist groups to operate because of our laws on freedom of expression and the ease with which people can travel and raise money here.''

He bases his conclusions on media reports about Al-Arian and Al-Najjar. Those reports also initiated the government investigations.

The reporters who produced those stories stand behind their work.

``Our original series said we thought these people were tied in some way to terrorists, to people, not actions,'' says Michael Fechter, The Tampa Tribune reporter who has led the charge against Al-Najjar and Al-Arian. ``There is a relationship at some level of communication between what was here and what was there. I don't think that could be disputed based on logic or fact.''

A careful reading of the Tribune stories -- dozens of reports that began in May 1995 and are still being produced today -- substantiates his characterization. But ``some level of communication'' leaves a lot of room for perfectly innocent activity. The totality of The Tribune's coverage did not. The tone, the presentation, the volume of the stories suggested, intentionally or not, that extremely dark forces were on the prowl in Tampa.

Exactly right, says Steven Emerson of Washington, D.C., producer of a 1994 TV documentary that started the whole thing. His Jihad in America, broadcast by the Public Broadcasting System, described a Tampa group run by Al-Arian as ``the primary support group in the United States for Islamic Jihad.''

He says Islamic Jihad operated a ``support center'' in Tampa. What is a support center?

``It raises funds for the Islamic Jihad movement,'' Emerson says. ``It sends out communiques in support of Islamic Jihad. It disseminates political propaganda in support of Islamic Jihad. It coordinates with terrorist operatives. It facilitates terrorist capabilities.''

The program won a prestigious Polk Award for journalistic excellence, but Palestinian activists say Emerson plays a bit fast and loose. They say he is a mouthpiece for the Israeli government; he vehemently denies it.

He says, ``I have no agendas. Period.''

Both Fechter and Emerson point to one undeniable truth: A man named Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, an academic who worked closely with Al-Najjar and Al-Arian from 1992 to 1994, now lives in Syria and has landed another job.

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Shallah is now the maximum leader of Islamic Jihad.

"Inshallah"

Buckle yourself in. This story involves a culture generally foreign to most of us and therefore seemingly menacing. It is studded with names not easily recognized on second reference; issues of church and state and of international diplomacy; and troubling questions about the media.

It begins with a large and growing community of 15,000 Muslims who live in the Tampa area. Maybe twice that number live in South Florida.

Nationwide, estimates come close to six million, nearly equaling the number of Jewish people in America. Islam soon might surpass Judaism as the largest non-Christian religion in the United States.

Many Muslims are not Arabs; many Arabs are not Muslims. Experts believe that about two million people in the United States have Arab origins.

Though most Muslims and most Arab Americans have integrated well into society, many still feel like outsiders. They sense that their culture and history, even their names, set them apart, color them with suspicion, subject them to discrimination both subtle and profound.

"People feel stigmatized in a lot of ways, most obviously in rushes to judgment like after the Oklahoma City bombing," says Sam Hussein of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. With 10,000 members, the group calls itself the largest Arab-American grassroots organization in the country.

"We get the standard negative xenophobia you see with a lot of groups, but we get it coupled with political tension."

Now 32, Hussein was born in Jordan. His birth name: Osama Hussein. His father, a banker, had the son's name legally changed after they arrived in America. The new, Americanized name: Samuel Frank Hennessy.

"My dad was trying to protect me from this kind of discrimination," says Hussein, who later blended his new first name with his ancestral last name.

Says Al-Arian: "The stereotype of Muslim people -- the Palestinians -- as the others, the strange, the terrorists, that's false. That image must be changed.

"Muslims who live here are here by choice. They want to enrich the country. We love American society. We want to be part of it, be enriched by it and enrich it as well.

"If it was otherwise, why would they trouble themselves with intellectual things? How many terrorists have Ph.D's?"

Al-Arian's wife, Nahla, is also Al-Najjar's sister. She was born in Saudi Arabia to Palestinian parents. At one point in our conversations, she quotes Rush Limbaugh. Wait, I say. You listen to Rush Limbaugh? She laughs.

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``Sure,'' she says. ``I'm an American.''

Sami Al-Arian currently serves as principal of the Islamic Academy of Florida, a private school he helped establish. It sits in Tampa on six acres along a dead-end street near the University of South Florida.

It boasts one permanent building that houses offices and a mosque that has become controversial. The rest of the campus consists of air-conditioned, well-lit portable classrooms.

About 160 students attend classes that range from kindergarten to the 12th grade. Fully accredited, the school also teaches Islamic studies and Arabic.

The students seem very attentive, and I'd bet there are few discipline problems here. When Al-Arian and I enter a kindergarten classroom, the children stand as one and say, in Arabic: ``Peace upon you and the mercy and blessing of God.''

The boys are dressed in blue slacks, white shirts and athletic shoes. The girls wear blue jumpers and slacks, white blouses and -- for the older students -- white scarves that cover their hair for modesty, a youthful version of hijab, traditional Muslim attire.

It is not exactly jarring but . . . interesting to see the students dressed like this, yet excitedly speaking perfect -- in most cases, unaccented -- English and skipping through the campus and playing paddy cake.

They huddle over Acer and Compaq computer terminals, and then, after lunch, they quietly enter the mosque for prayers. The boys crowd side by side near the front, the girls in back. At the time he was arrested, Al-Najjar was the imam -- the pastor -- of this mosque.

Just outside the mosque's front entrance, one finds a box of cubby-holes constructed to temporarily hold shoes. No one may wear shoes inside a mosque. With the kids inside, the box is filled with Reeboks, Filas and Nike Airs.

To each other, the students and others here often begin sentences with, ``Inshallah.''

God Willing.

Inshallah, I'll be there. Inshallah, it will be completed soon.

They smile genuinely at visitors.

``Saalem alaichen,'' they say. Peace be upon you. Nearly the same as the Hebrew ``Shalom Alaichem,'' another reminder of the close origins of the Israelis and the Palestinians, and how close, in many ways, they remain.

Menace to Society?

Right here, let's address two fundamental questions:

1. Do Al-Najjar, Al-Arian and their associates pose a direct threat to us?

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Unless the government is hiding it, absolutely no evidence exists that they represented any menace to domestic tranquillity. Not even their opponents have charged that.

An immigration judge, speaking about Al-Najjar, said: ``The respondent has never caused harm or suffering to any person.'' Nevertheless, Al-Najjar was in jail a month later because secret evidence supposedly showed him to be a ``threat to society.'' More on that soon.

Vara, the INS lawyer, hints that something else may be going on here. He says terrorist activities can extend beyond ``designing a bomb or shooting someone.''

``It can include providing material support or the solicitation of membership or the solicitation of funds,'' he says.

2. So, did they knowingly and actively support terrorism in the Middle East? This question is more complex.

We shall see a provocative pattern of events: immigration irregularities, avid support for Palestinian independence, contacts with suspicious characters (including that associate who later turned up as mega-leader of Islamic Jihad), sponsorships of meetings in which militant remarks may have been expressed, the collection and disbursement of millions of dollars for Palestinian causes.

The two insist that each of these circumstances has an innocent explanation. ``You can add up zeros and still end up in zeros,'' Al-Arian says.

They insist they are pro-Palestinian scholars, not terrorists.

They insist that they do not condone attacks on civilians, though attacks on Israeli soldiers are another matter.

Sitting with him in the jailhouse, I confront Al-Najjar:

You must tell me the truth -- you wake up in the morning and hear that a bus has been bombed in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, what is the very first thing that you think?

``This is the last thing we need for the Palestinian cause and for the Arab cause.''

This is the truth you are telling me?

``Oh, absolutely. There is an Islamic dilemma for those who are resisting by this way. They understand that civilian suffering is not allowed in the Islamic practice of war. Except for one way, which is their excuse, as a deterrent to the enemy who is doing the same thing.''

Anyone familiar with the Mideast knows this is a pretty big loophole, large enough to accommodate lies to authorities and reporters. Al-Najjar acknowledges that, but says it's not the case here.

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``I don't believe this practice [violence against civilians] is legitimate,''  
Al-Najjar says. ``At the same time, I do not condone occupation.''

Fair enough, if he's telling the truth. Whether we agree or not, many  
Palestinians believe their land and their destiny have been stolen by Israel.  
Whether we approve or not, many Palestinians still advocate armed struggle against  
Israeli military authorities.

A day later, sitting in an office 10 yards from the mosque, I ask Al-Arian the  
same question: What is the very first thing that goes through your head when you  
hear about Israeli civilian casualties?

``I feel terrible. Every time civilians are in war, you are not serving your  
cause. If it was a soldier, I would understand. If it was a barracks, I would  
understand. This is an occupation.

``But if you are talking about civilians, it's wrong, regardless. How many  
times must I say it? I'll keep saying it.

``It is wrong. Anything that has to do with civilian casualties, it is just  
morally wrong, religiously wrong as well as politically wrong. How can you get  
people with you when you're doing that?''

Still, an impressive amount of smoke swirls over this affair, possibly  
obscuring the truth.

Maybe, as they say, they ardently but peacefully supported their cause --  
raising money for social services, sponsoring seminars and publishing articles  
simply to advance the Palestinian cause and boost Palestinian morale.

Maybe they turned a blind eye to the potentially nefarious uses of the money  
they raised and the moral support they stirred.

And even if they knowingly, cleverly aided and abetted terrorists by raising  
money for weapons and by sowing radical views, it is not clear that such action  
was illegal.

A federal grand jury in Tampa, either working with exquisite care or seeking  
the indoor record for procrastination, is still investigating. One recent subpoena  
mysteriously referred to money laundering -- another oddity in an odd case.

Still, once again, at the date of this writing, more than three years since the  
allegations arose, no one has been publicly charged with anything except, in  
Al-Najjar's case, that fairly common immigration rap.

#### Ties to Terrorists

It all began with that PBS documentary produced by Emerson and broadcast in  
November 1994. Jihad in America depended largely on anonymous sources but it  
seemed to make its case: a Muslim fundamentalist network of terrorists thrives in  
the United States.

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The 60-minute film dwelled for about five minutes on Al-Arian and a group that he and others formed in Tampa, the Islamic Committee for Palestine. The film called the ICP a ``primary support group'' for Islamic Jihad. It offered little proof other than the statements of ``law-enforcement sources'' and the presence of some militant speakers at ICP conferences.

Even before the broadcast, Emerson had been developing a reputation as an expert in international terrorism. More recently, he has developed a reputation -- deserved or not -- as an anti-Arab activist and an ally of the Israelis.

``This guy has it in for Arabs and Muslims,'' says Hussein of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. ``He's a bigot. I feel very comfortable saying that.''

I call Emerson, but we don't get off to a great start. I mention that I wrote a brief newspaper story about this affair last year.

``Oh, really?'' he says instantly. ``What perspective did you take? That this is a brutal Zionist plot against the weak, underprivileged Arab minority?''

Uh, no. That there's an interesting situation over in Tampa and a guy being held in jail on secret evidence.

OK, Emerson says, I'll call you back.

He doesn't, but a few days later, I call him again and we speak at some length. I ask him if he thinks Al-Najjar, Al-Arian or anyone else involved in this case did anything illegal.

``That's a very good question,'' Emerson says. ``The Hamas infrastructure has lots of social and religious institutions. They're not all illegal and they do fill a void, but they're all dedicated to the indoctrination of the militant Islamic doctrine.

``Ninety-nine percent of extremist activity is legal. That doesn't mean it should be immune to media coverage or exposure.

``If people say, 'We believe in jihad and we believe in killing all the Jews,' that is not actionable from a legal point of view, but it certainly shows that someone is an extremist.''

In January 1996, during a public forum to air complaints about his and The Tampa Tribune's coverage, Emerson seemed to take delight in provoking the largely Muslim audience and then pointing to their angry reaction as proof of their instability.

He said, ``We made it crystal clear that an Islamic Jihad network in the U.S. was being run out of Tampa.''

He said the University of South Florida was really ``Jihad University.''

He said local Muslims didn't really understand America or its democratic

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institutions.

By the end of the session, some local Palestinians were jumping to their feet, hurling angry responses to Emerson's statements, stepping toward the stage.

Back in 1994, Emerson's PBS documentary came to the attention of Michael Fechter, the reporter for The Tampa Tribune. Fechter worked out of an outlying bureau, covering the University of South Florida. Then 31, he had been at The Tribune for about six years.

He says he was shocked when he realized the film's implications.

``Somebody on my beat was associated with people who support people who kill,'' Fechter said during that public forum.

Local Muslims say that is a textbook example of guilt by association.

Anyway, Fechter began looking into the alleged connections between Al-Arian, his group (the ICP), the University of South Florida and international terrorism.

On May 28, 1995, after a lengthy journalistic investigation, The Tribune began a major two-day series written by Fechter. It was called Ties to Terrorists .

In the huge headline, the words ``Ties to'' were dwarfed by the much larger word, ``Terrorists.'' The package dominated the front page. Its focus was Sami Al-Arian.

The story begins:

TAMPA -- On the University of South Florida campus, Sami Al-Arian is an award-winning young engineering professor.

In his off hours, he presides over a nonprofit organization that helps raise money in the name of two groups that claim responsibility for bombings that have killed hundreds in Israel and around the world. . . .

As president of the Tampa-based Islamic Committee for Palestine (ICP), Al-Arian also has helped bring other major terrorist leaders -- including those from the Islamic Jihad and Hamas -- to the United States for conferences in Chicago.

Al-Najjar, identified primarily as an Al-Arian associate who also had close ties to suspicious characters, played only a minor role in the first few stories. Soon, that would change.

The Twilight Zone

Time for a closer look at the two co-stars of our little drama:

Al-Najjar was born in Gaza to Palestinian parents. He was raised in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Carrying Egyptian travel documents, at the time a common occurrence for the

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stateless Palestinians, he arrived in the United States in 1981 as a student. He has a doctorate in engineering from the University of South Florida, where he also taught Arabic.

Al-Najjar has salt-and-pepper hair and a closely trimmed beard. He is afflicted with diabetes and an occasional stutter.

His wife, Fedaa, was born in Saudi Arabia but is of Palestinian descent. Their three kids were born in the United States. Like him, Fedaa has overstayed her visa and has been ordered deported. She is free as she appeals that order.

But Al-Najjar is in the pokey as his deportation appeal drags through the system. He's being held as a ``threat to national security'' because of his alleged links to terrorists.

He is trapped in INS hell, unable to bust his way out of an Orwellian nightmare, bouncing into the walls of judicial absurdity. He fits any regulatory-legal cliché you can find.

Amazingly, he'd be in somewhat better shape if only he could prove he's a terrorist.

Last May 15, an immigration judge ordered him deported to the United Arab Emirates, where he lived for two years nearly 20 years ago. If stateless deportees refuse to designate a destination country, INS regulations require them to be sent to their ``last place of habitual abode.'' For Al-Najjar, the UAE comes closer than any other country to meeting that definition.

But Al-Najjar and his lawyer say the allegations published in The Tribune have so tarnished Al-Najjar that the UAE won't accept him. Even if it did, his life would be miserable there. Like most moderate Arab states, the UAE barely tolerates Palestinians and is very unaccommodating to suspected terrorists.

The judge insisted that the UAE would take him because ``the respondent [Al-Najjar] failed to provide evidence that directly associates him with supporting terrorist efforts and that published allegations regarding such would subject him to persecution.''

Once again, for clarity: Al-Najjar's failure to establish that he is a terrorist or supports terrorism makes him a perfect candidate for deportation to the UAE.

In the margins of the judge's order, Coton, one of Al-Najjar's lawyers, wrote: ``This is Twilight Zone stuff! NewSpeak?''

Now comes the other shoe:

Eighteen days later, after Al-Najjar was arrested and his lawyers sought bond, another INS judge heard government officials claim that Al-Najjar was involved with terrorist-front organizations.

That second INS judge then met behind closed doors with the government

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representatives. Al-Najjar and his lawyers were barred. The judge viewed the secret evidence. He returned to the courtroom.

He ordered Al-Najjar kept in jail. Indefinitely. Without bond.

``The respondent is deemed a threat to National Security, a threat to society and a possible flight risk,'' the judge wrote. ``The Court considered classified material in reaching these conclusions.''

Coton and Martin Schwartz, Al-Najjar's lawyers, jumped up and demanded to see the evidence.

Denied.

To confront Al-Najjar's accuser.

Denied.

To at least have the evidence described to him.

Denied, though the judge said it consisted of one or two pieces of paper and he needed help comprehending it.

Secret evidence is prohibited in most criminal cases, but a decades-old law allows INS judges to use it under certain circumstances. The INS and the FBI say they sometimes must resort to such evidence to protect confidential informants and other sources.

Legal experts say the secret evidence almost always is thrown out when cases move beyond the INS administrative phase and into the conventional court system. Judges there rule that the evidence is unconstitutional or insufficient or simply violates their sense of fair play.

But that can take years. Meanwhile, about a dozen other people around the country, almost all of them Arab, now face predicaments similar to Al-Najjar's.

``There hasn't been an outcry because this is a group of people that's still easier to paint in the 'them' corner rather than the 'us' corner,'' Coton says.

``As soon as Floridians or Americans in general start thinking it's 'us' who are being denied rights or may face imprisonment based on evidence we can't see, I think there will be an explosion.''

Maybe, but the use of secret evidence has now been expanded beyond immigration matters into a new legal arena.

An anti-terrorism law signed by President Clinton in 1996 sanctions secret evidence in certain criminal cases against suspected terrorists or sympathizers. Still untested, the law is expected to face constitutional challenges.

The Garbage Company

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It appears that Al-Najjar is not much more than a pawn in this whole affair.

The feds really appear to be after his brother-in-law, Al-Arian. Al-Najjar says the FBI asked him to betray Al-Arian by informing on him. Agents seem convinced that Al-Arian is a prime U.S. contact for Palestinian terrorists.

Al-Arian, 40, is an engineering professor currently on paid leave of absence from the University of South Florida. He gets \$62,802 a year not to teach. The school won't let him have contact with students because of the allegations swirling around him; it can't fire him, because the allegations are unproven and he almost certainly would sue.

Al-Arian was born in Kuwait of Palestinian parents. He arrived in the U.S. in 1975 and earned a doctorate in engineering from North Carolina State in 1985. A few months later, he won a tenure-track position at USF.

His work at USF has been described by the school as ``outstanding.'' He was instrumental in forming the Islamic Academy of Florida, the private school he now serves as principal. He is a lay leader of his mosque.

Al-Arian comes across as a passionate advocate of Palestinian rights, a man who is careful with his words, aware of the potential influence -- both negative and positive -- of the media.

He is either very genuine in his rejection of violence against civilians or very quick to sense traps.

I ask him if he believes that the government's behavior in his case may be creating the very militancy it is attempting to suppress. Most people in his position would answer affirmatively, seeing an opportunity to trash their opponents as acting counter-productively.

Al-Arian says: ``I don't think any sane person in this country is going to make any foolish act and think he is going to get even. You don't get even by committing foolish acts. You just get a foolish person.''

Al-Arian helped form the ICP and another organization that later became very controversial, the World and Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE). The Tribune and federal investigators claim that both served as fronts for terrorists.

Al-Arian denies it. He denies everything.

He says he has been targeted simply because he advocates Palestinian independence and had contacts with people who may or may not support terrorism. He says authorities -- spooked by the media reports -- are using extraordinary means to prove a case against him that can't be proven.

Al-Arian struggled for two years to see portions of his INS file, material used by the agency to deny him citizenship and then withheld from public disclosure. Last August, he finally prevailed. What was this secret information?

Eighteen pages of photocopied newspaper clippings from The Tampa Tribune and

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The Palm Beach Post.

The material does not have quite the same official standing as the ``secret evidence'' employed against Al-Najjar, but it comes pretty close. Is the INS evidence against Al-Najjar as flimsy as the evidence against Al-Arian? Only the government knows.

One of the most traumatic moments in all of this, Al-Arian says, came in November 1995 when 25 federal officers raided his home and office. They carted away documents, audiotapes, videotapes and computer files.

They did not show their weapons, but still, ``they came in like an invasion. `FBI, FBI,' they shouted.'

Later, his mother called him. She also lives in Tampa. She was terrified. She said a huge truck was parked outside her house. ``It says BFI on it,' she reported, confusing those initials with the FBI.

BFI is the local garbage company.

Guilt by Association?

After its initial bombshell story, The Tampa Tribune published numerous follow-ups about Al-Arian and Al-Najjar.

The main points of the coverage:

-- Al-Arian and Al-Najjar worked at the ICP and WISE with Khalil Shikaki, whose brother -- Fathi -- was a founder of Islamic Jihad. And the groups tended to support Palestinian activists or terrorists.

The response from Al-Arian and Al-Najjar: WISE was a legitimate academic think tank. ICP was a legitimate Palestinian support group. Khalil Shikaki long ago disassociated himself from terrorists. This is classic guilt by association.

-- Al-Arian arranged for work visas for Ramadan Abdullah Shallah (about whom we'll hear more in a moment) and Basheer Nafi. Both were later identified as members of Islamic Jihad.

The response from Al-Arian and Al-Najjar: Both Shallah and Nafi were leading Palestinian intellectuals who had much to offer WISE. The U.S. government, which issued the visas, didn't know they were dangerous, so how were we supposed to know?

-- Two ``terrorists,' Hassan Turabi and Rashid el-Ghanoushi, were invited to speak at ICP conferences. Other alleged terrorists, including Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, later convicted of conspiracy to blow up New York tunnels and the United Nations, and Islamic Jihad founder Abdel Aziz-Odeh attended the conferences. Some made militant statements.

One attendee quoted unnamed people as saying, ``The Zionist entity is the dagger in the heart of the Muslim world and must be eradicated.' A map displayed at several meetings said, ``Palestine is ours as witnessed by our martyrs.'

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The response from Al-Arian and Al-Najjar: Anyone who spoke at ICP conferences won visas from the U.S. government, so -- again -- if the government wasn't worried about them, why should we have been? Turabi met with members of Congress and the editorial board of The Washington Post during the same trip: Are those institutions guilty of supporting terrorism? Many of the supposedly militant statements resulted from mistranslations or misunderstandings of their remarks in Arabic. Besides, the sponsor of an event can't be held responsible for every utterance made there.

-- Money raised by the ICP in the name of Hamas' charitable arms ``frees other cash for weapons and terrorist activity.''

The response from Al-Arian and Al-Najjar: This is impossible to determine or prevent. The money was meant for hospitals, orphanages and the like, and all the evidence suggests it ended up there. Are American Jews at risk if the money they contribute to Israeli charities replaces government money that then finances assassination plots by Israel's intelligence agency?

-- Al-Arian and Al-Najjar are leaders of a mosque named for ``Izzadin Al-Qassem, a martyr to Islamic Jihad and considered father of armed Palestinian nationalism.''

Interestingly, The Tribune's reports repeatedly misspelled Al-Qassam, whose name is spelled properly in several places on the actual mosque. Local Muslims say ``Al-Qassem'' is the spelling used by Israeli intelligence.

The response from Al-Najjar and Al-Arian: Yes, Al-Qassam is a symbol of Palestinian resistance, but any other implication is a cheap shot -- sensationalistic, out of context and hypocritical. How can we simultaneously be secretive and so open as to choose this name for the mosque?

-- Al-Arian didn't include his membership in ICP and WISE on his citizenship forms, and he illegally registered to vote.

Al-Arian's response: Innocent, minor errors. He didn't fully realize what he was signing during a local voter-registration campaign. State prosecutors have decided not to prosecute him for that.

-- Al-Najjar illegally registered to vote and was accused by the INS of engaging in a sham marriage for visa purposes in 1985. The marriage later ended in divorce.

Al-Najjar's response: The same as Al-Arian's on the voting matter. He denies the sham marriage (the evidence tends to support the allegation but seems inconclusive). In any event, by immigration standards, it was not a huge deal.

Murray the Barber

Now, our plot thickens, and the focus returns for a time to the Middle East.

Oct. 26, 1995: Fathi Shikaki, the leader of Islamic Jihad, is assassinated on the Mediterranean island of Malta, apparently by Israeli agents. A reminder: His

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brother, Khalil, had worked with Al-Arian and Al-Najjar in Tampa.

Oct. 31, 1995: Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, 37, who also worked at those two Tampa groups with Al-Arian and Al-Najjar and who taught part time at USF, turns up in Syria as the new leader of Islamic Jihad.

Shallah had left Tampa about four months earlier. Before he did, he had attended public affairs seminars at nearby MacDill Air Force Base, home of the U.S. Central Command, which ran the Gulf War and still controls American forces in the Middle East.

People back in Tampa expressed shock. They said Shallah, never expressed radical views. He held a doctorate (it seems some terrorists do get Ph.D's) in economics from the University of Durham in Britain. He never seemed to be anything but a Palestinian intellectual.

That sure changed. In Damascus, Shallah had this message for the Israeli prime minister: ``You will pay a high price, as high as the value of Shikaki in our hearts.'' Yitzhak Rabin was later assassinated, though by a Jewish militant.

WISE issued a statement saying that Shallah had directed the group from 1992 to 1994 and was ``a recognized scholar on Islamic history and economics.''

USF said it never had any complaints about him. As an adjunct professor, he taught one course of Middle Eastern politics during two semesters. He was paid \$2,300 per semester. After he popped up with Islamic Jihad, the school opened up his e-mail and computer files and found nothing suspicious.

Both the university and WISE said that no one, including the U.S. government and -- possibly -- Israeli intelligence, suspected that Shallah had strong contacts with Islamic Jihad.

In fact, Nahla Al-Arian points to this irony: ``The whole focus by [Steven] Emerson and The Tribune was on Sami and not on Ramadan while Ramadan was right here.''

Fechter concedes the point.

``We were actually short of the mark,' ' he says. ``We never said there were active members of Islamic Jihad here, and now we know there were.''

I ask Sami Al-Arian: You don't really think Shallah was completely disassociated from these radicals the whole time he was in Tampa, do you?

Well, maybe, Al-Arian says.

``You're thinking in Western terms. In our countries, things are different. Emotions, social standing, family ties, the initial trust that you bring people. You don't need to be in position for 10 years. He doesn't have to be the second in command to succeed.''

Nonsense, says Fechter.

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``Are you going to pick Murray the barber to run Islamic Jihad? I don't think so. This was their No. 2 guy.''

At any rate, Al-Najjar says that as soon as he heard the news about Shallah, he knew he was in big trouble.

``It's a disaster for me and for my community, for my friends, for him as an academician.

``I couldn't understand. How can I cope with the world after this event? Because it's a different world now.

``I wish to see him one day and ask him why he did what he did, and I wish he could know how much damage this has done to his friends.''

Did Al-Najjar and Shallah ever speak of terrorism? Again, the easy, safest answer would be ``no,' ' but Al-Najjar doesn't go for that one. Did they talk about terrorism?

``Of course. We talked about that because it's part of the Palestinian experience. But I didn't expect him to be in a political organization which has also a military aspect.''

The Tampa Tribune had a field day. The news about Shallah seemed to substantiate everything the paper had charged.

Three weeks later, federal agents raided Al-Arian's home, his USF office and the office of WISE. A month later, they also searched a storage shed. In all, they carted away 60 boxes of documents, hundreds of audio and videotapes, 280 megabytes of computer files.

Included in the haul: magazine articles expressing support for Hamas, Al-Arian's mailing list and ``a 1993 Islamic Jihad calendar.''

Four months after that, authorities released documents to justify the seizures. An INS agent and an FBI agent said they documented phone calls between Al-Arian and two ``known alien terrorist suspects,' ' associates of those convicted in the World Trade Center bombing of 1993.

INS Agent William West, quoting a confidential source, wrote that he ``had cause to believe that ICP and WISE were utilized by Sami Al-Arian and Ramadan Abdullah Shallah as `fronts' ' to help terrorists enter the country.

West also wrote that the federal investigation into WISE and the ICP began when he read The Tampa Tribune's series. Until then, apparently, authorities had no reason to suspect Al-Arian and Al-Najjar of anything.

"A Magnet for Radicals"

The Palestinian community in Tampa has called The Tribune's stories reckless, shallow, uninformed, ideological, selective in their use of sources and fact.

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One of many examples they cite is this paragraph from the first part of the Tribune series:

Al-Arian's background is unclear. Immigration papers contained in his personnel file show he was an Egyptian citizen when he came to USF in 1986. On one form, he initially wrote: 'Palestinian,' but that was crossed off.

Ah-hah, the reader might think. This guy was trying to camouflage his origins. Except for this:

Proud of their heritage, most Palestinians insist on describing themselves as Palestinian on such forms. But many nations do not recognize Palestine as a nation, so immigration authorities routinely strike the reference and replace it with whatever country has granted travel documents to the arrivee.

Near the end of that first story, Fechter and The Tribune note that ICP's allegedly nefarious activities have dried up in recent years. But the last paragraph quotes Steven Emerson, who produced that controversial TV documentary:

'The issue is any extremist group with its headquarters in your community,' he said. 'It serves as a magnet for radicals coming in.'

End of story. Lock your doors and windows, and whatever you do, don't open any packages.

Fechter responds to any suggestion that his reporting was slanted this way:

'I never considered it advocacy journalism. I considered it pretty basic stuff. I wasn't trying to create an outcome. I was trying to call attention to facts. I thought that was what journalism was about.'

At least initially, Fechter and Emerson developed a relationship in which they seemed to share information. Some local Palestinians claim that both had religious or political agendas. Fechter is Jewish; Emerson won't say.

'I'm amazed that The Miami Herald would be asking questions about other reporters' ethnicity,' Emerson responds angrily. 'Once you start asking about the religion or the ethnicity or color of other journalists, you're playing right into the racism of those doing the attacking.'

In any event, both insist that religion has nothing to do with their coverage. (One of Al-Najjar's lawyers also is Jewish. And I am Jewish.)

Emerson has published several books and magazine pieces on the threat of international terrorism, and he has written several opinion pieces for The New York Times and others.

He is not infallible.

In the immediate aftermath of the World Trade Center bombing, Emerson pointed to Serbian terrorists.

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He was wrong.

After the April 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building, Emerson quickly appeared on television to claim that it bore the hallmarks of Muslim terrorists, the very network he had asserted flourished right here in the United States.

Wrong again.

Extremely self-assured and sensitive to criticism, Emerson has on occasion fired off unsubstantiated charges and waved around documents and videotapes that he refuses to show anyone.

In February 1996, Emerson spoke at a luncheon in St. Petersburg. He charged that Palestinian advocates at USF were involved in the World Trade Center bombing in 1993. He mentioned no names, but the implication extended to Al-Arian and his associates.

``I am constrained at this point from revealing some of those details, but I can tell you they will come out in the near term,' he said, adding later that the USF connections will soon ``come to light in a particularly embarrassing way.''

Now, two years later and with those responsible for that bombing tried and convicted, no further word has emerged from Emerson or anyone else about a Tampa connection to that event.

Scratching an Itch

Over at USF, administrators were rocked by the allegations published by The Tribune and later by reports of Shallah taking over Islamic Jihad. A taxpayer-supported university supposedly sheltering international terrorists? My God.

Local Jewish leaders met with university officials. University president Betty Castor, a former state commissioner of education, ordered the campus police chief to contact federal authorities. They told him they had no information about terrorist activities or of any threat to the campus population, according to USF spokesmen.

The school ended its affiliation with WISE after discovering some procedural problems, one of which was the hiring of Al-Najjar as an Arabic instructor by USF. The school funneled his salary through WISE because Al-Najjar didn't have a legal work permit.

The school also asked William Reece Smith Jr., a prominent local lawyer and former USF president, to conduct an independent investigation.

After a four-month study, Smith issued a 99-page report supported by 112 pages of other documents.

He found a few administrative irregularities and said school officials could have done more to assure people that the controversy was being taken seriously.

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But he found no significant errors or failures by the school. And he found no indication of a link between Al-Arian or his associates and terrorism.

Smith wrote that Al-Arian, Al-Najjar and Shallah had ``remarkable ties'' and their ``convergence in Tampa is obviously not coincidental,'' but he cautioned against drawing any conclusions.

``As yet, no one has shown that those ties are meaningful,'' he said. ``It's not established that anybody was supportive of or engaged in unlawful or terrorist activity.''

Smith said Al-Arian -- if not as a citizen then certainly as an academic -- has a right to hold and express unpopular views and must be ``presumed innocent until proven guilty.''

That was two years ago. From USF's perspective, not much has changed. Al-Arian is still on paid leave, earning a full-time salary for not teaching.

University administrators have about had it. They are angry. Not at Al-Arian. At the government.

``How long do you intend to put this man and this university through this?'' says Pat Riordan, a special assistant to USF's president and a former Herald reporter. ``Certainly there's a limit.''

If nothing changes by the time the fall semester begins in August, school officials say, Al-Arian will resume his university teaching.

So there we are.

Three years have passed since the allegations first arose.

No charges. No absolution. No firm conclusions, now or maybe ever.

The grand jury is still investigating. Al-Arian is still under fire. Al-Najjar is still in jail.

Steven Emerson, whose film first raised the issue:

``I feel much more comfortable knowing that Mazen Al-Najjar is in jail and that Sami Al-Arian cannot speak and propagate his message to young students, because it is militant doctrine under a false veneer.''

Michael Fechter, the local newspaper reporter:

``I think we've been accurate the whole way. Everything we've written is true. Everything we've written is documented. It's hard to combat emotion, but we've tried to do that with fact.''

Sami Al-Arian, the alleged terrorist sympathizer:

``We just want to be part of this country. We just want to be part of the

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debate, OK? We're not asking for anything more.'

Mazen Al-Najjar, the other alleged terrorist sympathizer, still being held on secret evidence:

'I don't want to be labeled for the rest of my life with the labels that have been alleged against me here. This is the last thing I expected in my life.

'Human beings are different sorts. Some people, they have strong hearts or hard hearts, but I really envy them.

'Every day here in jail I am asking myself, 'I think God sent me here to teach me that lesson, and I'm not getting it. I'm not learning to be really hard-hearted.'

'I have lived the intellectual life a long time, but I was not really scratched enough in the realities of life. I am scratched a lot now.'

MARTIN MERZER is a senior Herald writer.

color photo: two girl out side Dr. Sami Al Arian office at Islamic Academy (a), Mazen Al Najjar in his Bradenton jail cell (a), Sami Al Arian and his wife Nahla at their Mosque in Tampa (a), girls at the Islamic academy wear blue jumpers (a), young girls at Islamic Academy in Tampa (a), Mazen Al Najjar (a), young girls fixes her scarf during prayer in Mosque (a), Mazen Al Najjar's wife Fedda (a), Mazen Al Najjar (a-ran on the cover)

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## **Extra!**

January/February 1999

# **Steven Emerson's Crusade**

**Why is a journalist pushing questionable stories from behind the scenes?**

**By John F. Sugg**

Did self-styled anti-terrorism expert Steven Emerson help push the world toward nuclear war?

On Sunday, June 28, a sensational story appeared in the British newspaper **The Observer**: "Pakistan was planning nuclear first strike on India." The stunning revelation that South Asia was on the brink of thermonuclear war was credited to an unnamed "senior Pakistani weapons scientist who has defected." The next day, papers on the Indian subcontinent were full of the news. Shock spread and distrust mounted. "The scenario is frightening," stated the **Times of India** (6/29/98).

On Wednesday, July 1, a **USA Today** report by Barbara Slavin named the defector, Iftikhar Chaudhry Khan. The press scrambled to contact New York lawyer Michael Wildes, who represents Khan in his attempt to get political asylum.

Emerson, in an odd role for a journalist, worked behind the scenes to interest reporters in Wildes' client. A top network news producer says his congressional sources and news contacts were tipped to the story by Emerson. Slavin says she was mainly convinced of the story's legitimacy because of one of the **Observer's** three writers was associated with the prestigious military analysis group Jane's, but that Emerson's involvement added credibility. Attorney Wildes himself says, "Emerson was helpful in corroborating information and making scientific clarifications."

As the story matured, skepticism mounted about Khan, especially after sources in Pakistan described him as "a former low-level accountant at a company that makes bathroom fixtures." (**San Diego Union-Tribune**, 7/3/98) By July 7, U.S. nuclear physicists had interviewed Khan and pronounced him a fraud (**USA Today**, 7/7/98).

### **Emerson's priorities**

Emerson has escaped notice in the affair--but his efforts had helped craft a hard-to-erase public perception that Pakistan was the bad guy among Asia's nuclear novices.

The role Emerson played may at first seem perplexing. He presents himself as a journalist, yet he handed off what appeared to be a major story to rivals. A closer look at Emerson's career suggests his priority is not so much news as it is an unrelenting attack against Arabs and Muslims. From this perspective, his gambit with Khan seems easier to understand: Pakistan is a Muslim nation, while India's nuclear program has long been linked to Israel. As the **Indian Express** noted (6/29/98), Pakistani politicians were "convinced that they were about to be attacked by India, possibly with Israeli assistance."

Emerson's willingness to push an extremely thin story--with potentially explosive consequences--is also consistent with the lengthy list of mistakes and distortions that mar his credentials as an expert on terrorism.

Those blemishes had, for a time, seemed to drive Emerson from major news outlets. He has had to resort to new tactics to maintain his anti-Muslim crusade--an "anti-terrorism" journal that he uses as a soapbox, associates whose reputations aren't as damaged as his, and, as in the Khan episode, staying behind the curtains.

Emerson was back in the news last August--when terrorist bombs shattered U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. While most Americans watched the grisly nightly news in open-mouthed dismay, self-styled anti-terrorism experts seemed to be jostling with one another to grab a few minutes on **Rivera Live**, the **Today** show and **CNN**. For a brief few days, they even displaced the Monicagate pundits.

In the vanguard of the chattering heads was Emerson, whose past errors were quickly forgotten in the wake of African and Middle Eastern carnage.

### "Middle Eastern Trait"

Emerson gained prominence in the early '90s. He published books, wrote articles, produced a documentary, won awards and was frequently quoted. The media, Capitol Hill and scholars paid attention. "I respect his research. He gets to people who were at the events," says Jeffrey T. Richelson, author of *A Century of Spies*.

As Emerson's fame mounted, so did criticism. Emerson's book, *The Fall of Pan Am 103*, was chastised by the **Columbia Journalism Review**, which noted in July 1990 that passages "bear a striking resemblance, in both substance and style" to reports in the **Post-Standard** of Syracuse, N.Y. Reporters from the Syracuse newspaper told this writer that they cornered Emerson at an Investigative Reporters and Editors conference and forced an apology.

A **New York Times** review (5/19/91) of his 1991 book *Terrorist* chided that it was "marred by factual errors...and by a pervasive anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian bias." His 1994 **PBS** video, *Jihad in America* (11/94), was faulted for bigotry and misrepresentations--veteran reporter Robert Friedman (**The Nation**, 5/15/95) accused Emerson of "creating mass hysteria against American Arabs."

Emerson was wrong when he initially pointed to Yugoslavians as suspects in the World Trade Center bombing (**CNN**, 3/2/93). He was wrong when he said on **CNBC** (8/23/96) that "it was a bomb that brought down TWA Flight 800."

Emerson's most notorious gaffe was his claim that the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing showed "a Middle Eastern trait" because it "was done with the intent to inflict as many casualties as possible." (**CBS News**, 4/19/95) Afterward, news organizations appeared less interested in Emerson's pronouncements. A **CBS**

contract expired and wasn't renewed. Emerson had been a regular source and occasional writer for the **Washington Post**; his name doesn't turn up once in **Post** archives after Jan. 1, 1996. **USA Today** mentioned Emerson a dozen times before September 1996, none after.

"He's poison," says investigative author Seymour Hersh, when asked about how Emerson is perceived by fellow journalists.

### Dubious document

Yet Emerson seems irrepressible. In 1997, for example, an **Associated Press** editor became convinced that Emerson was the "mother lode of terrorism information," according to a reporter who worked on a series that looked at American Muslim groups.

As a consultant on the series, Emerson presented **AP** reporters with what were "supposed to be FBI documents" describing mainstream American Muslim groups with alleged terrorist sympathies, according to the project's lead writer, Richard Cole. One of the reporters uncovered an earlier, almost identical document authored by Emerson. The purported FBI dossier "was really his," Cole says. "He had edited out all phrases, taken out anything that made it look like his."

Another **AP** reporter, Fred Bayles, recalls that Emerson "could never back up what he said. We couldn't believe that document was from the FBI files."

Emerson's contribution was largely stripped from the series, and he retaliated with a "multi-page rant," according to Cole. **AP** Executive Editor Bill Ahearn does not dispute that the incident happened, but refuses to comment or to release documents because the episode was deemed an "internal matter." A ranking **AP** editor in Washington says: "We would be very, very, very, very leery of using Steve Emerson."

Also during Emerson's lean years, he scored a November 1996 hit in the **Pittsburgh Tribune-Review** (11/3/96)--owned by right-wing Clinton-basher Richard Mellon Scaife, who also partially funded *Jihad in America*. Considering Scaife's patronage, it is not surprising that Emerson declared that Muslim terrorist sympathizers were hanging out at the White House. Emerson had a similar commentary piece printed three months earlier in the **Wall Street Journal** (8/5/96), one of the writer's few consistent major outlets.

### Tampa's "terrorists"

His most fruitful media foray during this period was at a Tampa, Florida, newspaper. Emerson's *Jihad in America* video had, in part, targeted Islamic scholars at the University of South Florida in Tampa. Following Emerson's leads, a reporter for the **Tampa Tribune** launched a series of articles in 1995 titled "Ties to Terrorists." The series and subsequent articles relied on Emerson as a primary source.

The **Tribune's** managing editor, Bruce Witwer, wrote in a July 15, 1997, letter to an attorney: "Emerson is an acknowledged expert in the field, while he may be controversial. Emerson has the information. It is legitimate information." But the information that Emerson is "controversial"--much less Emerson's record of mistakes and the allegations of bias that swirl around him--has never been disclosed by the **Tribune** to its readers.

The **Tribune's** articles lacked balance and fairness, according to other newspapers that have covered the events, including the **St. Petersburg Times** and the **Miami Herald**. The **Herald** (3/22/98) ran a lengthy

analysis of the **Tribune's** reporting and concluded the Tampa newspaper had ignored "perfectly innocent" interpretations of activity, giving vent only to characterizations that suggested "extremely dark forces were on the prowl."

Among the **Tribune's** and Emerson's charges are that Muslims, while at the University of South Florida, were active Islamic Jihad commanders. Emerson told Congress: "One of the world's most lethal terrorist factions was based out of Tampa." If that's so, federal agents must have missed something. Although the FBI and INS have been searching for clues for more than three years, no charges have been filed.

Like Emerson, the **Tribune** uses tenuous chains of association to bolster its claims that individuals are linked to terrorist groups. For example, in one article, the **Tribune** claimed that because an Islamic Jihad leader had given a **Reuters** reporter, Paul Eedle, several articles, including one interview published in a Tampa magazine, and because material seized by federal agents in Tampa included a 1993 Jihad calendar, this proved an organizational linkage. The **Tribune** (7/28/98), ignoring the stated purpose of the South Florida scholars to collect material about and from all Middle East points of view, stated: "Eedle's experience appears to tighten the relationship between the Jihad and the Tampa group."

Eedle, when interviewed for this article, said that while it was clear people in Tampa were sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, "being given the magazine didn't prove that there was any organizational link between Islamic Jihad and the publishers of the magazine in Tampa."

Although no criminal charges have been filed in the Tampa case, Emerson flatly states there is insidious wrongdoing. In February 1996, Emerson claimed that Tampa Muslim academics were directly involved in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing (**St. Petersburg Times**, 2/10/96). "I am constrained at this point from revealing some of those details," Emerson said. "But they include money transfers, they include actual reservations and planning for the conspirators in the bombing, and they include visits back and forth between Tampa and New York and New Jersey, between officials here of the groups [operating in Tampa] and officials there."

Yet no federal record of such allegations could be found. A Freedom of Information request to the Justice Department seeking any information tying Tampa residents to the World Trade Center bombing produced this reply from the Office of the Deputy Attorney General: "Please be advised that no responsive records were located."

Actions have been taken against a couple of Emerson's targets. Emerson seemed to gloat (**Miami Herald**, 3/22/98) that one Tampa academic, Mazen Al-Najjar, has been jailed during a deportation appeal since May 1997 based on secret evidence that he is a national security threat. And he appeared gleeful that another University of South Florida professor, Sami Al-Arian, was removed from the classroom and is now unable to "propagate his message to young students" (**Miami Herald**, 3/22/98). Typical of Emerson's fact-checking, the university says no one has ever alleged that Al-Arian, who is again teaching, brought politics into the classroom.

### "Arabaphobia"

This summer's U.S. embassy bombings produced others who believed in Emerson's legitimacy. **Geraldo** welcomed Emerson, as did **NPR**, **Good Morning America** and **MSNBC's Internight**. Emerson popped an opinion piece into the **Wall Street Journal** (8/8/98), that attacked Clinton for "legitimizing self-declared 'civil rights' and 'mainstream' Islamic organizations that in fact operate as propaganda and political arms of Islamic fundamentalist movements."

Although he piously prefaces diatribes by saying there are good Muslims and bad Muslims, it's a hollow defense. He claimed, in a March 1995 article in **Jewish Monthly**, that Islam "sanctions genocide, planned genocide, as part of its religious doctrine."

Occasionally, Emerson outdoes himself with hyperbole. In an inflammatory letter to the **Voice of America** (12/2/94), he fumed that radical Muslims in the United States are plotting the "mass murder of all Jews, Christians and moderate Muslims." Buddhists, Wiccans and Scientologists are apparently exempt in the apocalypse Emerson prophesies. Last year he warned that "the U.S. has become occupied fundamentalist territory" (**Jerusalem Post**, 8/8/97).

While Emerson makes incredible claims about Muslim conspiracies that purportedly intend to commit terrorism inside U.S. borders, he ignores the fact that far more of these American atrocities, such as the anti-abortion bombings and murders, are committed by apple-pie militant Christian fundamentalists.

His denunciations are often backed up only by allusions to unnamed law enforcement sources. "Emerson makes unsubstantiated allegations of widespread conspiracies in Arab-American communities and brushes aside his lack of documented evidence by implying it only proves how clever and sinister the Arab/Muslim menace really is," investigative reporter Chip Berlet has written (**Covert Action Quarterly**, Summer/95). "This is a prejudiced and Arabophobic twist on the old anti-Semitic canard of the crafty and manipulative Jew."

Emerson buffs, such as Sen. Jon Kyl (R.-Arizona) provide the journalist with a podium from which to make claims that are then recycled as part of the public record. A Kyl subcommittee welcomed Emerson as a witness in February, allowing him to present a 46-page harangue against mainstream American Muslim organizations.

### **Savaging critics**

When criticized by journalists, Emerson retaliates with invective-laden letters, often from lawyers. He has launched salvos at the **Miami Herald**, **The Nation**, **Voice of America**, **FAIR** (which publishes **Extra!**), and a Council on Foreign Relations newsletter, as well as at numerous individual journalists.

Kojo Nnamdi, a talk show host on Howard University's **WHUT**, remembers that when he invited some Muslims on a program, "Emerson started making threats. He wanted to link academics to terrorists. He succeeded in delaying the program, I'm sorry to say."

After Emerson in 1996 attacked the Council on Foreign Relations for including Muslim points of views in its newsletter, the group's president, Leslie Gelb, dubbed Emerson the "grand inquisitor." (**Forward**, 5/10/96)

The **Miami Herald's** highly regarded senior writer, Martin Merzer--who has experience as a bureau chief in Jerusalem--demolished many of Emerson's and the **Tampa Tribune's** claims in a March 1998 article (3/22/98). Prior to publication, Emerson sent a letter to the **Herald's** top editor, Doug Clifton, with copies to Jewish leaders, in an attempt to derail the story. The letter called Merzer, who is Jewish, "nothing short of racist."

Subsequently, in a publication run by Emerson allies that has become his bully pulpit, the **Journal of Counterterrorism & Security International** (Spring/98), Emerson published what he claimed was a transcript of his interview by Merzer. The "transcript" presents Merzer as stammering and admitting to extraordinary ignorance. Merzer calls the transcript a fabrication. "It's crap," he says. "A few tiny

kernels of truth surrounded by a mountain of lies."

Ironically, despite Emerson's many attempts to silence his critics, he spends much of his time nowadays wailing that he's the victim. Recently, an **NPR** producer was moved by protests over Emerson's anti-Muslim prejudice to stop using him as an expert on the network. That prompted Emerson fans, such as **Boston Globe** columnist Jeff Jacoby (8/31/98), to cry "blacklisting"--never bothering to note that Emerson is a blacklister with few rivals.

### Money trail

As recognition of Emerson's liabilities has grown, he has handed his bullhorn to less controversial fellow travelers. Retired federal agents Oliver "Buck" Revell and Steve Pomerantz, who run a security business, showed up echoing Emersonisms in an October 31 **Washington Post** article warning of conspiracies and front organizations.

In an interview prior to the article's publication, the co-author of that piece, John Mintz, said he was aware that Emerson was highly controversial. The **Post's** solution: Don't mention Emerson but use his allies. (Mintz had been provided with material documenting links among Emerson, Pomerantz and Revell.)

The three "experts" spend a lot of time congratulating each other on their courage and expertise. Pomerantz, for example, has written that Emerson "is actually better informed in some areas than the responsible agencies of government." (That came as news to Bob Blitzer, the FBI's top counterterrorism official, who says Emerson "doesn't have access to any high-level FBI intelligence.")

Revell's credits include quashing an investigation of the Iran-Contra arms smuggling operation (Leslie Cockburn, *Out of Control*, p. 231). Revell also acknowledges another member of the fraternity is Yigal Carmon, a right-wing Israeli intelligence commander who endorsed the use of torture (**Washington Post**, 5/4/95), and who has stayed at Emerson's Washington apartment on trips to lobby Congress against Middle East peace initiatives (**The Nation**, 5/15/95). An **Associated Press** reporter who has dealt with Emerson and Carmon says: "I have no doubt these guys are working together."

Says Vince Cannistraro, an **ABC** consultant and a retired CIA counterterrorism official, of Emerson's allies, Pomerantz, Revell and Carmon: "They're Israeli-funded. How do I know that? Because they tried to recruit me." Revell denies Cannistraro's assertion, but refuses to discuss his group's finances.

Emerson's own financing is hazy. He has received funding from Scaife. Some Emerson critics suspect Israeli backing. The **Jerusalem Post** (9/17/94) has noted that Emerson has "close ties to Israeli intelligence."

"He's carrying the ball for Likud," says investigative journalist Robert Parry, referring to Israel's right-wing ruling party. Victor Ostrovsky, who defected from Israel's Mossad intelligence agency and has written books disclosing its secrets, calls Emerson "the horn"--because he trumpets Mossad claims.

### Presumed credible

Emerson is aided by those who appear to be ignorant of his record, or who fear reprisal from his backers. He testified in February before a Senate subcommittee chaired by Sen. Kyl. The testimony accused most major American Muslim organization of terrorist connections. "We presumed him to be credible [because] he is known to have contact with street agents," said Jim Savage, at the time a Kyl

staffer. "He represented his findings as authentic. We haven't verified them."

After the **NPR** spat over the summer, Jacoby's column quickly bludgeoned the network into capitulation. Jeffrey Dvorkin, **NPR's** news chief, kowtowed and stated in a letter to the **Boston Globe** that Emerson "has never been banned from **NPR** and never will be. Emerson is one of many commentators available to **NPR** on events involving his area of expertise (terrorism and counter-terrorism). No doubt there will be other opportunities for him to appear again."

A warning to us all.

---

*John F. Sugg is senior editor of the **Weekly Planet**, the alternative newspaper in the Tampa Bay area. He regularly writes media criticism, including articles on Steven Emerson and the **Tampa Tribune's** coverage of Muslims. Sugg has received three threatening letters from Emerson's lawyer seeking--unsuccessfully--to deter further reporting.*

- Read the press release from The Journal of Counterterrorism and Security International, issued after the publication of this article.
  - Read FAIR's response, [\*Extra!'s Report on Steven Emerson: Setting the Record Straight\*](#).
- 

## Emerson on Islam

"The level of vitriol against Jews and Christianity within contemporary Islam, unfortunately, is something that we are not totally cognizant of, or that we don't want to accept. We don't want to accept it because to do so would be to acknowledge that one of the world's great religions -- which has more than 1.4 billion adherents -- somehow sanctions genocide, planned genocide, as part of its religious doctrine." --Steven Emerson, **Jewish Monthly** (3/95)

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Todd Clem, aka Bubba the Love Sponge, an R-rated Tampa talk radio jock whose attacks inspired threats that helped get Al-Arian fired.

## The prime-time smearing of Sami Al-Arian

By pandering to anti-Arab hysteria, NBC, Fox News, Media General and Clear Channel radio disgraced themselves -- and ruined an innocent professor's life.

**Editor's note:** This story is anthologized in the Salon book "Afterwords: Stories Reports From 9/11 and Beyond." To buy the book, [click here](#).

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**By Eric Boehlert**

Jan. 19, 2002 | It may not provide him much comfort, but tenured University of South Florida professor Sami Al-Arian, recently fired after his appearance on conservative talk show revived discredited, years-old allegations of ties to anti-terrorists, may be the first computer science professor ever mugged by four of the nation's most influential news organizations.

USF administrators fired the Kuwaiti-born professor after he appeared on national television for five minutes of punditry last fall. His crime? Not telling viewers his views did not necessarily reflect those of the school. It was a tortured rationalization but guaranteed future litigation.

As Salon [recently reported](#), the Al-Arian episode raises disturbing questions about

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free speech, academic freedom and the future of tenured status. But what's also important to understand is the crucial role the press played in the unfolding s

The University of South Florida is ultimately responsible for firing Al-Arian. Equally culpable are Fox News Channel, NBC, Media General (specifically its newspaper) and the giant radio conglomerate Clear Channel Communications.

In the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, all four media giants, eagerly tapping into the country's mood of vengeance and fear, latched onto the Al-Arian story, fudging the facts and ignoring the most rudimentary tenets of journalism in their haste to better tell a sinister story about lurking Middle Eastern dangers here at home.

The story went national when Al-Arian was invited on the Fox News Channel's "The O'Reilly Factor" show back on Sept. 26. Host Bill revived inflammatory charges against Al-Arian dating back, in some cases, 10 years. Those charges were that a now-defunct Islamic think tank Al-Arian founded in conjunction with USF operated as a sort of home away from home for radical Palestinians and terrorists. The charges had been thoroughly investigated and rejected by USF, and an immigration judge; the FBI has been looking for years and has filed any charges.


Not even his harshest critics suggest Al-Arian has done anything in the last five years that could be even remotely construed as aiding terrorist organizations. The entire controversy sprang from the fact that viewers became enraged after old allegations were re-aired, albeit often in mangled form, by O'Reilly.

O'Reilly's accusatory and hectoring interrogation of Al-Arian, filled with false statements and McCarthy-like smears, climaxed in a chilling parting shot in which the host repeatedly told his stammering guest that if he were with the CIA, "I'd find you wherever you went" -- clearly implying that he believed Al-Arian was a terrorist. Not surprisingly in the fearful and hysterical climate after Sept. 11, the show was interrupted in a torrent of angry calls, including death threats against al-Arian, to USF.

Before firing him, USF placed Al-Arian on paid leave, saying his presence made the campus unsafe and pointing to an avalanche of hate mail and death threats.

But the Gulf Coast hysteria was entirely created by the media. Without the Tampa Tribune, which undertook a dubious seven-year crusade against al-Arian, there would have been no story to begin with. Without "The O'Reilly Factor" -- a showcase for noisy right-wing ranting whose producers apparently didn't even know that Al-Arian had been cleared of charges before they handed him over to their equally ignorant hanging-judge host -- the controversy would never have been revived. Without incendiary, know-nothing Clear Channel radio jocks, led by a gentleman named Bubba the Love Sponge, there would almost certainly have been far fewer USF death threats. And without NBC's sloppy work on "Dateline" there would probably have been no firing.

The Al-Arian story reveals what happens when journalists, abandoning their unbiased observers, lead an ignorant, alarmist crusade against suspicious fore who in a time of war don't have the power of the press or public sympathy to back. It's called a pile-on, and this game first began in Tampa, seven years ag

 **Next page | A shoddy tale of guilt by association -- picked up by INS**

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The Free Software Project

Read Andrew Leonard's book-in-progress on Linux and open source -- and post your comments.

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Section: NATION/WORLD

## USF GETS RID OF A HATEMONGER

University of South Florida President Judy Genshaft had compelling reasons to fire controversial engineering Professor Sami Al-Arian.

The Palestinian activist's outside activities unquestionably harmed the university, a clear violation of the faculty union's agreement with USF.

So it was understandable that the USF Board of Trustees, after considering employment attorney Tom Gonzalez's report, voted Wednesday to recommend that USF fire Al-Arian. Genshaft, after consulting with a number of university and state leaders, complied.

The engineering professor had been on paid leave since shortly after he appeared on Bill O'Reilly's national TV interview show in September. Al-Arian did not acquit himself well as O'Reilly peppered him with questions on his ties to terrorists.

O'Reilly, unfortunately, tarred the entire university, saying, USF "may be a hotbed of support for Arab militants." Al-Arian's TV appearance drew such an angry response from viewers around the nation that USF officials feared for students' safety.

O'Reilly's attack on USF was unfair, but, as Gonzalez pointed out, Al-Arian has not been diligent about making sure that he is not perceived as a USF representative when he espouses his views.

And those views are vicious, to say the least. Al-Arian has been recorded at meetings crying, "Death to Israel" and seeking to raise funds for murderous Palestinian groups.

Yet he has zealously pursued his cause to the detriment of USF and his academic duties. Consider this: He has been on paid leave 15 percent of the time he has been at USF because of controversies over his political actions.

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The question is not whether Al-Arian should be allowed to speak his mind. Genshaft put the question well in her statement to the trustees: " The issue before us is how much disruption the university must endure because of the manner in which a professor exercises his right to express political and social views that are outside the scope of his employment."

Al-Arian willfully allowed his political obsessions to unsettle, if not endanger, the entire university. He now is facing the consequences. Good riddance.

OUR OPINION

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

REGION: (Middle East (1MI23); Palestine (1PA37); Arab States (1AR46))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (HATEMONGER; OPINION; PALESTINIAN; TV; UNIVERSITY; USF) (Arian; Bill O'Reilly; Genshaft; Gonzalez; Good; Judy Genshaft; O'Reilly; Sami Al-Arian; Tom Gonzalez)

EDITION: Final

Word Count: 431

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2003 WLNR 1532933

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February 21, 2003

Section: NATION/WORLD

## THE SCORCHING INDICTMENT OF SAMI AL-ARIAN

The arrest Thursday of Sami Al-Arian, accused along with seven others of conspiring to aid and abet terrorism, including killings abroad by suicide bombers, ends a decade-long investigation into the nefarious activities of the University of South Florida professor.

In that time, Al-Arian has become the consummate manipulator, willing to take advantage of the freedoms here - to use the United States as a safe haven - to wreak havoc elsewhere.

He has loudly proclaimed that he is innocent of any wrongdoing, that he has never been involved with terrorists and that he has, in fact, been cleared because he has never been charged.

Well, he learned a year ago that the investigation against him was ongoing. And now a federal grand jury has accused him not only of aiding terrorist organizations, but of heading the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the United States and holding a leadership position as secretary of the Shura Council, the movement's worldwide governing group.

A 'Political' Arrest Indeed

After being taken in handcuffs from his Temple Terrace home before daylight Thursday, he told reporters that his arrest was political.

On that we agree. If the indictment holds up, the government will prove that he has for years been active in the politics of terror, and he will be held accountable for it.

The indictment is damning, bringing to light intercepted reports and recordings of telephone conversations over the years between Al-Arian and other defendants and known terrorists and terror organizations.

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Many of Al-Arian's activities have already been detailed by the Tribune's Michael Fechter, who deserves credit for yeoman service to this newspaper and community. He first raised the issue of Al-Arian's terrorist ties in 1995 - a moment, the indictment reveals, of great concern to the cell the professor is accused of establishing at USF.

Among his dubious and well-known achievements, Al-Arian was introduced at a 1991 Cleveland rally as head of "the active arm of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine." At the same rally, a speaker exhorted attendees to lend their support "for the Intifadah, for the Islamic Jihad, I say it frankly, for the Islamic Jihad."

The Islamic Committee for Palestine was a "charitable" organization run by Al-Arian that sponsored conferences around the country at which a number of Middle East radicals appeared, including Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman, who was convicted in the first World Trade Center bombing.

Also in 1991, Al-Arian recruited Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, also indicted Thursday, to run the World and Islam Studies Enterprises, a think tank he founded that worked with faculty at USF. After Shallah left WISE, he became head of the Islamic Jihad.

In 1995, after a double suicide bombing by the Islamic Jihad in Israel that killed 18 people, Al-Arian wrote a fundraising letter that referred to "two mujahidin martyred for the sake of God."

But the indictment reveals much more.

It discloses that in the early 1990s there was great division and infighting among the founders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. There was disagreement between those who advocated violence and those who did not - a structural division that Al-Arian healed. He arguably saved the movement.

As a leader of the group, the indictment charges, he directed the audit of all its moneys and properties throughout the world, and he utilized USF "as an institution where some of their members could receive cover as teachers or students." Moreover, he used the university to bring other Palestinian Islamic Jihad "members and associates into the United States under the guise of academic conferences and meetings."

Over some 70 pages, the indictment lists specific overt acts that plainly show Al-Arian and other conspirators in league with terrorists and other terror groups, including Hamas and Hezbollah.

He was keenly aware, according to the indictment, of terrorist acts - of killings in the Middle East. For example, on April 9, 1995, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad murdered eight people and wounded 40 when a suicide bomber detonated a bomb beside a bus in Kfar Darom, Gaza Strip. An American citizen, Alisa Flatow, 20, was among those who died.

The same day WISE received an announcement of the death of the "martyr" Khalid Al Khatib, the bomber. A minute later, so did Sami Al-Arian.

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Page 3

As late as 2000, Al-Arian edited the charter of the Palestian Islamic Jihad and forwarded it to others, the indictment says.

These and other revelations vindicate USF President Judy Genshaft, who more than a year ago - amid withering criticism - decided to fire Al-Arian. Clearly the impact of his activities far exceeds disruption to the university, the contractual basis for his pending dismissal.

#### Seeking Public Sympathy

Al-Arian proclaims his innocence and seeks public sympathy based on his assertions of victimhood - that because he is Palestinian and practices the Muslim religion, he has been, since Sept. 11, targeted by an overzealous government.

But with the information gathered by intelligence agencies and shared under new government rules with prosecutors, his ties to terrorism seem unassailable.

Al-Arian is presumed to be innocent. We will watch with interest to see whether he will attempt to explain or justify the evidence against him.

OUR OPINION

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**PARTICIPATE****Table Talk**

## "The Prime-time Smearing of Sami Al-Arian"

By Eric Boehlert

Jan. 29, 2002 | [Read the story](#)

I am writing in response to the Salon.com article of Jan. 19, 2002, by Eric Boehlert, titled "The Prime-time Smearing of Sami Al-Arian."

By way of refreshing memories, Al-Arian is a professor (his discipline is computer science) at the University of South Florida in Tampa who according to court documents has been a leading proponent of radical Middle Eastern politics. He helped found a think tank affiliated with USF -- World and Islam Studies Enterprises (WISE) -- that has been linked to Middle East radicals (another WISE founder went on to become head of the radical Palestinian Islamic Jihad). He has raised money for "the jihad effort in Palestine." And he has applauded terrorism while raining curses on the United States and Israel.

The Tampa Tribune's Michael Fechter began reporting on Al-Arian's activities in May 1995. The Tribune stands fully behind Fechter and his work. His has been a labor of years, in the course of which he has read thousands of pages of court documents and spoken with scores of individuals. His work in dozens of stories has met the highest standards and withstood the test of time.

We find it distressing that Mr. Boehlert did not exercise the same diligence in his reporting. For example, he writes that Al-Arian has "recently" been "fired" by USF. That is

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incorrect. The university's trustees recently recommended Al-Arian's dismissal. But the decision rests with USF President Judy Genshaft, who has said she won't render one in the Al-Arian case until the end of the month.

As his story was first posted at Salon.com, Mr. Boehlert also wrote that the Tampa Tribune is owned by the Tribune Company. A simple check of the Tribune's Web site or any of a number of other easily accessible public sources would have shown that the Tribune is owned by Media General. [This error subsequently was corrected, but not before the version of the story containing the incorrect reference had been replicated on a number of other Web sites.]

This is basic fact-checking, but Mr. Boehlert made both errors even before completing his first paragraph -- errors he used as springboards for his assertion that a number of media outlets, the Tribune included, "disgraced themselves -- and ruined an innocent professor's life." These errors cast a long shadow over the rest of Mr. Boehlert's article, which contains a long list of other mistakes.

For instance, Mr. Boehlert writes that Al-Arian "had been cleared of charges." That is untrue. No case has ever been brought against Al-Arian in court, and consequently there has never been an occasion to "clear" Al-Arian. What Mr. Boehlert seems to be referencing here is an immigration case brought against Al-Arian's brother-in-law. But Al-Arian was involved in that affair only as a witness, and while testifying he took the Fifth Amendment roughly 100 times (which, it bears noting, was his right).

Mr. Boehlert also writes that the accusations against Al-Arian "had been thoroughly investigated and rejected by USF." That, too, is untrue. There was an investigation. But the investigator was denied access to all relevant files and documents.

Mr. Boehlert alleges a connection between Fechter's stories and the decision by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to recommend against Al-Arian's application for U.S. citizenship, writing: "Weeks after the first of the paper's Al-Arian stories ran, the professor's citizenship application was derailed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service." In fact, according to INS documents and court records, the sequence leading to this was set in motion well before the first of Fechter's Al-Arian stories. The INS said it rejected Al-Arian's application on grounds of moral character because he had registered to vote and then voted illegally.

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Mr. Boehlert also writes of the St. Petersburg Times "agreeing the Tribune's charges against Al-Arian were weak and revolved around questionable journalism." In fact, the Times -- citing documents referenced in a segment of the NBC program "Dateline" and disclosed by Fechter more than a year earlier -- said in an editorial on Nov. 1, 2001:

"Many of Al-Arian's past statements and associations have raised suspicions that he was involved with terrorist organizations based in the Middle East. However, the fund-raising letter signed by Al-Arian, shown during the Oct. 28 telecast of NBC's dateline, is direct evidence of his active support for terrorism."

We also find it distressing that Mr. Boehlert frequently employs distortions or omissions of fact to make his argument. For example, Mr. Boehlert writes of "the role Fechter played in helping [Bill] O'Reilly's producers prepare for" an installment of Fox TV's "The O'Reilly Factor" on which Al-Arian made an appearance. Mr. Boehlert's wording would have readers believe that Fechter was an active participant in this process. In fact, O'Reilly's producers called Fechter (and others, presumably) as part of their research. Fechter pointed them to the record, and faxed them a limited number of documents that were part of it. Journalists worldwide do this for other journalists every day as a professional courtesy. It is not meant to substitute for original reporting. It is meant to help other reporters find and/or confirm information for themselves that is already in the public domain.

In addition, Mr. Boehlert writes of another journalist named John Sugg subsequently being contacted by Fox producers for a follow-up program on Al-Arian:

"'They said they did not know there was exculpatory information or that a judge had examined this stuff,' says Sugg. 'They felt like O'Reilly got blindsided.'"

The insinuation is that O'Reilly's producers were somehow misled by Fechter, and that Fechter therefore was to blame for Al-Arian's subsequent "firing," which of course hasn't happened. What is missing is corroboration of this from O'Reilly's producers. What is also missing is that Sugg is a former Tampa Tribune employee who made a hobby of Tribune-bashing for several years afterward as the editor of a small weekly alternative newspaper in Tampa.

Mr. Boehlert writes that Fechter "seemed to be an odd

choice" to write the Al-Arian story because he was a "county news reporter [who] wrote crime stories, covered local city council politics and monitored neighborhood action groups." What is missing here is that Fechter's beat was USF, where Al-Arian worked and where he helped found WISE.

And Mr. Boehlert also omits or mischaracterizes evidence taken directly from court documents that is crucial to the issue of whether Al-Arian has worked on behalf of the radical Palestinian Islamic Jihad. In one instance, for example, Al-Arian is shown telling a 1991 rally in Chicago, "Let us damn America. Let us damn Israel. Let us damn their allies until death." In another, he is introduced at a 1991 rally in Cleveland as head of "the active arm of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine." And in a third, he is shown to have written a 1995 fundraising letter 10 days after a double suicide bombing by the Islamic Jihad in Israel in which 18 people were killed. Al-Arian's letter references the "two mujahidin martyred for the sake of God" and asks for donations "so that operations such as these can continue" (Mr. Boehlert seems to suggest that this was an appeal for charity).

Finally, we find it distressing that Mr. Boehlert repeatedly uses hyperbole to press his argument. He declares Al-Arian to be "not a dangerous terrorist but a fairly mainstream -- that is, pro-intifada -- Palestinian who in his hot-headed youth made regrettably inflammatory comments about Israel, but who has never been tied to any terrorist groups." He accuses the Tribune of joining "an ignorant, alarmist crusade." He writes that "Fechter breathlessly reported that Al-Arian had raised money for Islamic groups that had killed hundreds of people around the world." This is language calculated to manipulate and inflame; it is never a substitute for hard-nosed reporting.

Errors, distortions, omissions, mud-slinging. Yet Mr. Boehlert professes himself to be calling to account others for "fudging the facts and ignoring the most rudimentary tenets of journalism in their haste to better tell a sinister story." We are left to wonder at the paradox.

Gil Thelen, Executive Editor, The Tampa Tribune

Eric Boehlert responds:

Thelen writes I was sloppy to report Al-Arian had been "fired" by the University of South Florida: The university's trustees had simply recommended Al-Arian's dismissal. True, but the move was widely interpreted as a firing at the

time, and was reported that way by the Associated Press, CNN and the Orlando Sentinel. Even Thelen's own paper, the Tampa Tribune, recently reported that "University of South Florida President Judy Genshaft fired Sami Al-Arian last month."

He is right in pointing out Salon misidentified the Tribune's corporate owner. Salon corrected that error less than 20 hours after it was posted. By contrast, last October the Tribune painted Al-Arian as an unrepentant radical when it informed readers he'd made hateful, anti-Israel remarks in 1998. Instead, those comments were made 14 years ago. It's been 100 days and the Tribune has yet to correct that egregious error.

Thelen argues Al-Arian was never charged with anything so therefore he can't be cleared. That's disingenuous spin, because the entire premise of the Tribune's crusade against Al-Arian is that the USF-associated Islamic think tank and a separate charity organization he founded were linked to Palestinian terrorists. After examining those charges in a case involving Al-Arian's colleague and brother-in-law, here's what immigration judge Judge R. Kevin McHugh wrote in 2000: "Although there were allegations that ICP and WISE were 'fronts' for Palestinian political causes, there is no evidence before the Court that demonstrates that either organization was a front for the (Islamic Jihad). To the contrary, there is evidence in the record to support the conclusion that WISE was a reputable and scholarly research center and the ICP was highly regarded."

If that's not clearing Al-Arian of the charges I don't know what is. And perhaps that's why to this day no Tribune reporter has printed McHugh's quote in full.

Thelen also continues the Tribune's tradition of belittling USF's 1996, 200-page report on the Al-Arian affair. At the urging of faculty and community members, USF's president tapped William Reece Smith, former president of the American Bar Association, to lead an investigation. After conducting 59 interviews and looking at "hundreds of documents," Smith, like Judge McHugh, also found "no evidence" to suggest there were terrorist links to Al-Arian. Again, it's a finding which completely contradicts the Tribune's reporting.

Regarding the St. Petersburg Times, both that paper and the Miami Herald have raised serious doubts about the Tribune's reporting on the topic of Al-Arian. The Herald concluded the Tampa newspaper had ignored "perfectly innocent" interpretations of activity, instead opting for the

assumption that "extremely dark forces were on the prowl."

The Tribune reported Michael Fechter *did* help Bill O'Reilly's producers prepare for their interview with Al-Arian. That's not in dispute. What is in dispute, though, is whether he simply "pointed them to the record," as Thelen suggests. If that's the case, then why didn't Fechter ever tell O'Reilly producers that a judge had examined all the allegations of terrorist activity and found nothing to substantiate them? That's a pretty stunning omission if Fechter was only trying, in Thelen's words, "to help other reporters find and/or confirm information for themselves that is already in the public domain." It would be less stunning if Fechter was trying to interest a cable news outlet in an unproven story that he'd never been able to take national.

Finally, in my story, I wrote Fechter "seemed an odd choice" to write about the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building, not an "odd choice" to write about Al-Arian, as Thelen tries to suggest.

Eric Boehlert

 **Next page | A researcher from the Simon Wiesenthal Center on Al-Arian**

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February 21, 2003

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Feb 21, 2003

## About This Story

Reporter Michael Fechter of The Tampa Tribune has reported on Sami Al-Arian's alleged ties to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad for almost eight years.

The first stories were in a May 1995 report called "Ties to Terrorists."

Al-Arian said then he had no involvement with terrorist groups.

His friends and associates, many of them members of the Muslim community in Tampa, began a letter-writing campaign: They said Al-Arian was portrayed unfairly and inaccurately.

Protests followed. One in July brought about 60 people to The News Center, which houses The Tampa Tribune; WFLA, News Channel 8; and TBO.com.

"Shame, shame, stop the lies and tell the truth," the protesters chanted.

The indictment unsealed Thursday that charges Al-Arian and seven others strongly suggests he and other alleged leaders of the Islamic Jihad were distressed by Fechter's reporting.

One passage refers to an intercepted telephone conversation in April 1995 between Al-Arian and someone identified as "Jamil," in which Al-Arian voices "concern that a Tampa Tribune correspondent inquired about his ties to terrorism."

Jamil questioned why Al-Arian had even responded to the inquiries, the indictment says. "[T]hey had previously decided that ... Al-Arian should say nothing," the indictment adds.

The indictment also notes later conversations.

One was between Al-Arian and Bashir Nafi, an Al-Arian associate alleged to head the Islamic Jihad in Great Britain.

"They ... discussed how to appropriately respond to the ongoing press investigation of ... Al-Arian ... and ... Nafi's insistence that it would be handled properly," says the indictment.

Less than two weeks later, the indictment says, Nafi directed "others to rally support for ... Al-Arian at USF."

Pat Minarcin

**This story can be found at:** <http://news.tbo.com/news/MGAF8ZEQFCD.html>

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## Hypocrisies, Double Standards and Lies

Al-Arian arrest reveals how selective the press and government are in dealing with terrorism funding

BY JOHN F. SUGG

Here's what you're supposed to know: Sami Al-Arian was indicted as a terrorist leader on Feb. 20. Here's what you're *not* supposed to think about: Sami Al-Arian never, even according to the indictment, committed violent acts. His nemesis Israel, on the other hand, will conduct "targeted killings in the United States and other friendly countries." (UPI, Jan. 15, 2003). An FBI official told the wire service that the agency regards the planned murder campaign as a "policy matter," not an issue for criminal investigation. The *St. Petersburg Times* and *The Tampa Tribune* didn't note the story.

Here's what you're supposed to know: Sami Al-Arian raised thousands of dollars for Palestinian causes, much of it allegedly funneled from fundraising events.

Here's what you're *not* supposed to know: Bob O'Neill, the federal prosecutor who for years led the Al-Arian probe, raised hard cash for the political front group for one of the most deadly terrorist organizations in the world, the Irish Republican Army. O'Neill was part owner of Tampa's Four Green Fields, whose walls are crowded with inflammatory anti-British hate rhetoric similar in tone to vitriolic statements by Al-Arian. This bar hosted numerous fundraisers for Sinn Fein and, by reasonable extension, the often-outlawed IRA. Twice since 1995, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams, at the time regarded as terrorist by the British, has been the star guest at the fundraisers. The local dailies ran articles promoting Adams' visits; no one suggested "ties to terrorists."

Here's what you're supposed to know: Palestinians have terrorist groups that kill civilians. Two young American women, who were slain in a bombing claimed by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, figure into Al-Arian's indictment.

Here's what you're *not* supposed to consider: Palestinians have no nation and no army. They have been under military occupation for 35 years. International law supports the right of occupied people to resist -- although the civilized world has recoiled at the suicide bombings of civilians. However, Israel, with one of the most powerful armies in the world, has killed far more civilians than the Arab terrorist groups.

### RELATED INFO.



PHOTO-OP: At the 2000 Strawberry Festival in Plant City, George posed for a picture with the family when he was running

president.

(credit: PHOTO COURTESY CARIAN FAMILY)

### MORE BY JOHN F. SUGG

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Here's what you're supposed to know: Al-Arian supposedly used financial schemes to conceal fundraising for Palestinian causes. Keep in mind, the total amount at stake is, at most, several hundred thousand dollars, and all money that flows to Palestinians from the U.S. is a trickle.

**MORE IN THIS ISSUE****Seeking Council**

Stormwater, gentrification, c  
Council candidates zero in o  
big and not-so-big issues  
BY RICK STONE

**Letters****Use this address for link**

Here's what you're *not* supposed to consider: Tens of *millions* are collected annually by American pro-Israeli groups and funneled through tax-exempt organizations. Some of the money goes to support military support operations, freeing Israeli money for weapons and lethal operations against Palestinians. Other money goes to underwrite "settlements," the colonial taking of Arab lands. One American businesss Irving Moskowitz, has raised as much as \$80-million for settlements.

Here's what you're supposed to believe: Al-Arian posed the most serious terrorist threat in F recent history. Clearly, all the news reports (310 nationwide in the three days after his arrest that.

Here's what you're not supposed to recall: While the feds were targeting Tampa Muslims, th real terrorist plot in Jacksonville in 1997 to bomb and kill former Israeli Prime Minister Shimec The perp was an Orthodox Jew, Harry Shapiro, who intended to blame the murder on (who Muslims. (That received one tiny brief in the Tampa Bay area dailies; 119 reports nationwide just last year, St. Petersburg podiatrist Robert J. Goldstein was collared with a stash of guns bombs, and a plan to blow up mosques (91 reports across the nation). The press accepts th standard "mentally ill" explanation in these cases -- and neither the media nor authorities sh interest in pursuing the possibility of broader conspiracies.

Here's what you're supposed to know: Al-Arian and friends associated with terrorists.

Here's what you're *not* supposed to know: A lot of people have associated with terrorists, inc George W. Bush, who posed in 2000 for a touching photo with the Al-Arian family. George's Jeb, has long been chummy with one of the Western Hemisphere's most notorious terrorists Bosch, mastermind of a jetliner bombing that killed 73 people in 1976. And, of course, Presi is offering Israeli strongman Ariel Sharon an Iraq war gift of more than \$10-billion, maybe as \$16-billion. Sharon is regarded as a war criminal by much of the world, stemming from his c in the slaughter of as many as 800 people, mostly women and children, at the Chatilla and S refugee camps. Sharon began his military career as part of the brutal "Unit 101" that massacr Palestinian villagers.

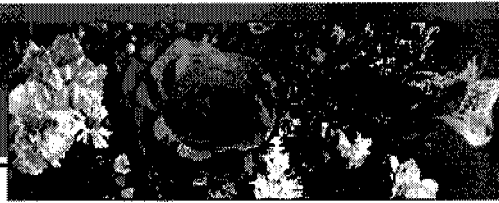
Here's what you're supposed to know: Attorney General John Ashcroft said of the indictmen make no distinction between those who carry out terrorist attacks and those who knowingly manage or supervise terrorist organizations,"

Here's what you're *not* supposed to ponder: There are many interesting terror and money cc in Washington -- Dick Cheney's Halliburton eagerly did business with Saddam Hussein, and Rumsfeld was a director of a company that, last week, was revealed as having provided nuc technology to North Korea (oops). Iran this month sued the United States in an international giving weapons of mass destruction to Saddam Hussein (almost no U.S. media coverage). and bin Laden families have long, friendly business associations, and there is considerable documentary evidence that Bush the First in 1991 ordered federal agents to back off from pr bin Laden partners. W's grandfather was an executive of a bank that "traded with the enemy Germany. In short, "evil," according to federal government, is relative -- it isn't the act, but wh doing it.

Here's what you're supposed to embrace: Al-Arian's critics -- notably *Tribune* reporter Micha Fechter and Fechter's mentor, Steven Emerson -- have been right all along.

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### Analysis: Terrorist probe sparks campaign

By Les Kjos  
United Press International

Miami, FL, Jun. 14 (UPI) -- The Democratic race for Florida's soon-to-be-vacant U.S. Senate seat is turning into a brawl on at least two fronts, with perhaps more to come.

Last week, former Vice President Al Gore accused one candidate, Miami-Dade County Mayor Alex Penelas, of being the most treacherous person he ran across during the 2000 presidential campaign.

Then a Florida political group filed a request Monday for records to try to show Senate candidate Betty Castor improperly failed to deal with a professor for aiding terrorists when she was president of the University of South Florida in Tampa.

Both allegations can be traced to a third candidate, Rep. Peter Deutsch, D-Fla., a longtime supporter of Gore and a well-known practitioner of bare-knuckles politics.

The American Democracy Project, which also has ties to Deutsch, is filing a public-information request on Castor, The Miami Herald reported Monday.

The ADP and Deutsch want to know the circumstances surrounding Sami al-Arian, a

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former computer-engineering professor charged with raising money for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Al-Arian and other former University of South Florida employees were named in an indictment last year alleging they contributed to suicide bombings in Israel.

A spokesman for Castor said she did not receive evidence that would have justified a dismissal.

Castor, a former state commissioner of education, left the university in 1999, and al-Arian was fired by her successor in 2003, a week after the indictment was filed.

ADP founder Bernie Friedman said the request seeks to find out what Castor could have done that she didn't do when she learned of al-Arian's activities.

"Today we are making a series of very detailed requests in an effort to ascertain the level of personal interest, concern, involvement and action (or inaction) by then-USF President Betty Castor during the Islamic Jihad reign at the University of South Florida," Friedman said in a prepared statement.

"Instead of becoming known for its academic accomplishments, USF because known as Jihad University, where known and indicted terrorists allegedly gathered, trained and thrived," Friedman said.

The ADP bills itself as an independent 527 issue-advocacy committee. The number refers to the section of the tax code that applies to such organizations.

Matt Burgess, Castor's communications director, responded that Castor didn't have the kind of information that could be used to fire al-Arian at that time.

- Analysis: Fixing sewers will cost billions
- Analysis: Terrorist probe sparks campaign

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"We are not surprised by a negative attack from Peter Deutsch's front group. He has attacked Alex Penelas since the beginning of the campaign, and it was only a matter of time before he directed his negative attacks on Betty Castor," Burgess said in a prepared statement.

"The facts of the USF case have been a matter of public record for years," he said.

The Castor campaign called on Deutsch and the ADP to release the names of all donors who have contributed to the group as well as the names of all staff and consultants paid by it.

Burgess said news reports in recent weeks have revealed that the organization exists to promote Deutsch's campaign and attack his opponents.

"People have a right to know who is behind these misleading, negative attacks," said.

Al-Arian, 46, was arrested Feb. 23, 2003, along with three other men. Two of them -- Hatim Naji Fariz and Ghassan Zayed Ballut - have been released on bond.

Sammeeh Hammoudeh is in jail with al-Arian. Four others who were indicted are at large overseas.

Hanging over it all is an anticipated challenge of the USA Patriot Act passed after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Castor said she opposes repeal of the law.

"The Patriot Act makes it easier to investigate and prosecute cases like the one we faced at USF," she said.

Al-Arian had been investigated for years, but he didn't reach the national consciousness until Sept. 26, 2001, when he

appeared on "The O'Reilly Factor" on Fox News Channel.

Host Bill O'Reilly brought up an investigation about a think tank al-Arian created on the University of South Florida campus. Al-Arian had been cleared by the university and the FBI.

Next came al-Arian's dismissal from the university by President Judy Genshaft and the board of trustees over strong objections by the American Association of University Professors on grounds involving academic freedom.

The 50-count, 121-page indictment charges the four with running a racketeering enterprise to finance a terrorist crusade against Israel that has taken more than 100 lives since 1984. A trial is set for January, but a delay is likely.

The flap involving Gore and Penelas reached a boiling point June 6 when Gore made a statement in an e-mail message to the Miami Herald, which published it Sunday.

The message said Penelas was "the single most treacherous and dishonest person I dealt with during the campaign anywhere in America."

Deutsch's verbal assaults on Penelas have drawn criticism. He said his approach has now been legitimized by Gore.

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Oct 5, 2004

## Senate Rivals Continue Al-Arian Duel

By WILLIAM MARCH  
[wmarch@tampatrib.com](mailto:wmarch@tampatrib.com)

**TAMPA** - Betty Castor's Senate campaign is trying to discredit statements of a former federal agent in an anti-Castor ad on terrorism, saying he's biased because of money from a conservatively oriented foundation.

Bill West, the retired agent, maintained Monday he's not aware of the money, which went to a company he consults for, and it hasn't affected his thinking.

The rival campaign of Mel Martinez, meanwhile, called Castor's effort ``a diversion" and renewed its criticism of her handling of a professor accused of supporting terrorism while she was University of South Florida president in the 1990s.

As the debate over the 10- year-old case has persisted into its third week, both sides appear to be seeking political gain on the issue of terrorism - to the near-exclusion of any other issue.

Castor, a Democrat, contends she acted appropriately by suspending Sami Al-Arian, a professor fired by her successor after he was indicted on federal charges. Martinez, a Republican, portrays her action as weak, suggesting she's not up to the terrorist threats of today.

``Ms. Castor was not prepared to speak out publicly against faculty members involved in the domestic support of suicide bombers," Martinez spokeswoman Jennifer Coxe said in a statement Monday.

``Al-Arian was the only guy on the radar screen," shot back Castor spokesman Dan McLaughlin. ``Betty Castor took action against him, and the Bush administration gave him clearance to the White House."

The truth is that very few Democrats or Republicans did much about Al-Arian for years after Steve Emerson's 1994 television documentary ``Jihad In America" began the public controversy.

Emerson, a longtime critic of Castor, acknowledged Monday there were ``not a lot of angels" taking proper action against terrorist threats before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

In 1994, West was an Immigration and Naturalization Service agent who became one of the first law officers to investigate the case of Al-Arian, accused of being a leader in financing the terrorist Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

### Agent Never Talked To Castor

Today West is featured on an anti-Castor TV ad for Martinez, even though West concedes he never spoke with Castor about his concerns at the time.

West also consults for The Investigative Project, a company founded by Emerson that won a \$600,000 grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation two years ago to produce a book about the financing of terrorist organizations.

``Mr. West is paid consulting fees out of the money from one of the most conservative groups in the world," said McLaughlin, the Castor aide. ``There's no question of his partisanship on this issue."

West said last week he's not involved in any political party, doesn't donate to candidates and isn't affiliated with the Martinez campaign beyond the ad. He said he made it to ``set the record straight on what actually happened."

What happened is that after more than a year of pointed questions brushed aside by many at USF, Castor put Al-Arian on paid leave in 1996 pending the federal investigation result. He was reinstated 18 months later as the case dragged on without charges.

Castor maintains she had no legal grounds to fire a tenured professor, an action that could have hurt USF in the academic world. She also points out her successor didn't take such action, either, until after Al-Arian was indicted last year.

Her campaign also emphasizes that Al-Arian was embraced by President Bush long after she left USF, with no objection from Martinez, a former state campaign co-chairman and federal housing secretary for the president.

After taking heat over the issue in her party primary race this year, Castor made a TV ad portraying her action as strong experience against terrorism.

Martinez produced the West ad in response, and Castor has produced a second ad countering that one.

West began working for Emerson's company last fall, about a year after the grant from Smith Richardson. He ``provides us information on various types of terrorist-related intelligence," Emerson said, but he isn't working on the project the grant funded.

West ``has nothing to do with the grant," Emerson said, and although full-time company employees aren't allowed to take sides in campaigns, West is a consultant, so ``I don't control what he says or does."

``I really don't know anything about the Smith Richardson grant. ... I don't even know what they are or who they are," West wrote in an e-mail response to questions Monday. ``I've had nothing to do with whatever The Investigative Project is doing with them."

### **About The Foundation**

Smith Richardson, set up on the fortune of the North Carolina family that invented and sold Vicks health products, funds research on government policy and social issues.

Some family members involved with the foundation are patrons of conservative causes. Trustee Lunsford Richardson Jr. of Connecticut, for example, gives to organizations such as the Republican National Committee, Republican National Senatorial Committee, the Club for Growth and others that have endorsed or supported Martinez.

The foundation also gives frequent grants to conservative think tanks such as the American

Enterprise Institute.

A spokesman said the foundation doesn't have a political agenda, however, and also makes grants to liberal or moderate organizations such as the Brookings Institution.

He said the foundation makes grants only for specific projects, on which it typically seeks outside, expert advice.

``We fund [research] on a lot of different policy issues," said foundation official Mark Steinmeyer.  
``We call them as we see them when we consider a grant."

*Reporter William March can be reached at (813) 259-7761.*

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October 18, 2004

Section: METRO

Debate Could Sway Tight Race SENATE CANDIDATES SET TO SQUARE OFF TONIGHT

ELLEN GEDALIUS and WILLIAM MARCH

By ELLEN GEDALIUS and WILLIAM MARCH

The Tampa Tribune

TAMPA Without even a day of rest Sunday in their fight over Sami Al-Arian, Mel Martinez and Betty Castor enter their first debate tonight with a new poll showing their U.S. Senate race tight, volatile and probably in the hands of undecided voters.

Among likely voters, Martinez and Castor each have 45 percent support, according to a survey released Sunday by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research for The Tampa Tribune and WFLA, News Channel 8. Nine percent remain undecided.

The telephone poll Thursday through Saturday produced a shift from a similar survey Oct. 4-5, which showed Martinez pulling ahead of Castor by 5 percentage points.

Both results are statistically debatable, given the error margin of 4 points, but the shift suggests fluidity in the contest as early voting starts today and the election looms Nov. 2.

The closeness of the race also suggests tonight's debate could prove significant. At 7 p.m. on NBC television and various radio stations statewide, it's the first of two; the second comes a week later, Oct. 25, on CBS TV and other radio stations in Florida.

The Senate winner will be the candidate who "can connect most with the voters," Castor said Sunday.

Yet both campaigns have struggled to connect on issues from taxes to health care, from jobs to education, because they have spent much of their time

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advertising their arguments about **Al-Arian**, who was a computer engineering professor suspected of aiding terrorism while Castor was president of the University of South Florida in the 1990s.

On Sunday, Castor pulled in Charlie Reed to respond to the latest volley from Martinez accusing her of handling **Al-Arian** weakly. Reed was the state university system chancellor when Castor put **Al-Arian** on paid leave as allegations dogged him.

Reed, today the California state university system chancellor, said Castor did what she could about **Al-Arian** without additional evidence from a federal investigation. It took until last year for **Al-Arian** to be indicted and fired by Castor's successor.

#### Help From Graham

Reed was joined on a conference call by retiring Sen. Bob Graham, the man Reed served as chief of staff when Graham was governor in the 1980s. Graham, too, has been among the chorus of Democrats defending Castor.

Both campaigns have aired ads about the controversy, but there was speculation Sunday that those may have hurt Martinez more than Castor. The new poll found his unfavorable name recognition rose 7 points in two weeks, while her favorable rating rose 3 points.

"There's a point where criticizing your opponent becomes seen as negative advertising," said Tim Lenz, a Florida Atlantic University political scientist. "He's had one foot on either side of the line."

Jennifer Coxe, Martinez's spokeswoman, responded to the poll by criticizing Emily's List for attacking the Republican. Emily's List is a national fundraising organization that backs female candidates who support abortion rights.

The poll found Castor may have picked up support in heavily Democratic South Florida. The previous poll showed her leading there 47 percent to 42 percent; now she leads 53 percent to 38 percent.

Pollster Brad Coker said data suggest Castor has solidified her Democratic base in the area, which she could have been slow to do because both of her rivals in the party primary were from South Florida.

#### Who Did What

In recent weeks, Castor traveled to South Florida to talk with elder voters about reducing prescription drug costs. Spokesman Dan McLaughlin said Castor ads about drugs and health care are airing in South Florida; the drug spot also is running in Tampa.

"Mel is going into the tank," McLaughlin said. "His attacks have blown up in his face, which is why he called Jeb Bush to the rescue."

Bush made an ad last week for Martinez contending Castor failed to act against **Al-Arian**, even though Bush, elected governor in 1998, took no apparent action such

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as calling for a state law enforcement investigation.

For that matter, neither did Bush's predecessor, Gov. Lawton Chiles or Reed or virtually anyone else in state government.

**Al-Arian** was involved in George W. Bush's 2000 presidential campaign, which Martinez co-chaired in Florida, and was invited to the White House in 2001, when Martinez was the president's housing secretary.

The Castor campaign has called Martinez hypocritical for criticizing Castor but not keeping Bush away from **Al-Arian**. The Martinez campaign has objected to that.

Martinez maintains Castor should have taken stronger action a decade ago, including speaking out against **Al-Arian**, although he has said he's unsure what action he would have taken in her position.

#### Reed's Response

Reed said Sunday he consulted frequently with Castor over **Al-Arian** and backed her contention that without provable charges, she couldn't fire a tenured professor.

"You all know how hard it is to get tenure," Reed said. "It's even harder to take it away."

Putting **Al-Arian** on leave was the toughest action she could take, and resulted in sharp criticism from the faculty, many of whom sided initially with **Al-Arian**, Reed said.

Firing would have required "a full due-process hearing, and without any information from the FBI or other law enforcement, you wouldn't get anywhere," he said.

"Betty was forceful. She took a tough position opposed by her own faculty," he said. "She couldn't get any information from law enforcement, but she knew that this was a bad person."

Speaking out publicly against **Al-Arian** would have harmed the university's position if it did seek to fire him, he added. "For us to be in the newspaper trying a tenure case ... would hurt our position."

#### It's Not Over Yet

Coxe, the Martinez spokeswoman, listened in on the conference call, sending out e-mail responses to reporters on the line. One was an August statement by Bill West, a retired federal agent involved in the investigation.

"Betty Castor's response (to **Al-Arian**) was tepid at best and, in reality, served to brush the matter aside in an effort to avoid embarrassment, conflict and controversy for the university and her," West said.

Graham, as the state's senior senator, sought help from federal authorities for

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USF at the request of Castor and later at the request of her successor, Judy Genshaft.

Graham said he met with Genshaft and FBI representatives in Tampa, but their only response was that the matter was "an ongoing investigation; they could not release any information."

When the controversy stirred again after the attacks of Sept. 11, USF trustees advised Genshaft in December 2001 to fire **Al-Arian**, who was accused of financing the terrorist Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Genshaft announced her intent to do so, and then sought a court ruling to approve the firing, which dragged out the process. She never got such a ruling, and he wasn't fired until after he was indicted last year on charges of conspiracy to murder.

Last week, **Al-Arian's** attorney said at a pretrial hearing that the Senate campaign ad barrage could make it difficult to find a fair jury so close to the election.

Jury selection had been considered a challenge anyway because of the trial's expected duration of six months or more.

"We could not anticipate that (**Al-Arian**) would become the issue that he apparently has become in this campaign," attorney William Moffitt said.

(CHART) 625 LIKELY VOTERS

If the 2004 election for Florida's U.S. Senate seat were held today, would you vote for Betty Castor, the Democrat; Mel Martinez, the Republican; or Dennis Bradley, of the Veterans Party?

Castor	45%
Martinez	45%
Bradley	1%
Undecided	9%

Do you recognize the name Mel Martinez? If yes, do you have a favorable, unfavorable, or neutral opinion?

Unfavorable	30%
Favorable	41%
Neutral	21%
Don't recognize	8%

Do you recognize the name Betty Castor?

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If yes, do you have a favorable, unfavorable, or neutral opinion?

Unfavorable 24 %

Favorable 39%

Neutral 28%

Don't recognize 9%

(CHART) SENATE DEBATE

WHO: Democrat Betty Castor, Republican Mel Martinez

WHAT: Televised debate at The News Center in Tampa

WHEN: 7 to 8 tonight

WHERE: WFLA, News Channel 8, will share the debate with all of Florida's NBC TV stations. It will be simulcast on Clear Channel and National Public Radio stations including WFLA, 970 AM, and WUSF, 89.7 FM. C-SPAN and WEDU, Channel 3, may air it after 8 p.m. Also, WUSF TV and radio plan a 30-minute, invitation-only "town hall" meeting afterward that is a converged project with News Channel 8, The **Tampa Tribune** and TBO.com.

FORMAT: The candidates will stand at lecterns to field questions from Tim Russert, host of NBC's "Meet the Press." Each candidate is allowed 90 seconds to respond and 60 seconds for a rebuttal. Russert may ask follow-up questions.

Tribune graphic; Source: Mason-Dixon Polling & Research

Reporter Peter Bernard of WFLA, News Channel 8, contributed to this report. Reporter Ellen Gedalius can be reached at (813) 259-7562. Reporter William March can be reached at (813) 259-7761.

PHOTO 2

CHART 2

Betty Castor

Enlists big names to defend her handling of **Al-Arian** case when she was USF president

Mel Martinez

Says his opponent should have taken stronger action against professor a decade ago

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**"IT SEEMS THEY DIDN'T TALK TO US AS FLORIDIANS"**

By BRAD SMITH

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TAMPA — Betty Castor and Mel Martinez wasted too much time on terrorist suspect Sami Al-Arian at the expense of education, environment and other issues important to Florida, voters on both sides of the U.S. Senate race said after Monday's debate.

With 9 percent of voters undecided in the latest statewide poll, many among the 30 who watched the debate at the public television studio of WUSF, Channel 16, on the University of South Florida campus said they learned little or nothing new.

The group was brought together through the efforts of WUSF, The **Tampa Tribune** and WFLA, Channel 8, which broadcast the debate from its studio several miles away.

Several viewers said the candidates to replace retiring Sen. Bob Graham, D-Miami Lakes, seemed to forget the concerns of average voters. A few blamed that on the nationally focused questions of moderator Tim Russert from NBC's "Meet The Press."

"It **seems** they didn't **talk** to us as **Floridians**," said Jim Messina, 59, a Tampa psychologist who plans to vote for Castor. "There was no compassion for us, when you've gone through the horrible hurricane disasters of the last few months as we have."

Lisette Vega, 33, a writer from Land O'Lakes, noted neither candidate talked about how to improve Florida's meager public transit system.

"For example, the bullet train. I think they should have at least addressed it," said Vega, who described herself as a "devout Republican" supporting Martinez.

What Castor did or didn't do as USF president about Al-Arian, a former professor suspected of financing terrorism in the Middle East, took up too much time in the debate, said most voters asked about the topic.

"This is certainly not an issue that should be the center of the campaign," said Nicholas Nitch, 57, a Tampa auditor who described himself as an independent and would not disclose his choice in the race.

Many reactions to the Al-Arian topic were predictable based on partisanship.

"It seemed [Castor] was more interested in protecting his rights as a professor than the student body," said Yvette Nunez, 26, a Martinez supporter who is a USF graduate and certified public accountant in Tampa.

Seth Hoffman, 31, a financial adviser from Riverview, said Castor, "as president of the university, would have had the responsibility to know what was going on on campus."

Yet Democrat Acima Cruz, 20, a USF student, said Castor's decision to put Al-Arian on paid leave pending developments in a federal investigation seemed appropriate.

"The issue needed to be resolved, and I think Betty Castor did a very good job giving more of a resolution to the problem," she said.

Either way, Cruz said, the most important issue of the campaign is the war in Iraq and what the would-be senators "would do now, not what they would have done in the past" in supporting or opposing the war.

Whether the candidates would support privatizing Social Security was among their sharpest disagreements, with Martinez in favor and Castor against.

"I prefer what Betty Castor said," said Tony Hamilton, 68, a retired public relations executive who plans to vote for her. "I think privatizing is very dangerous. We've seen what can happen to the stock market. People can lose their savings."

Some voters said they couldn't discern a difference between Castor and Martinez when they discussed how to cut the federal deficit.

"They said sort of the same things," said Robert Wiseman, 46, a Lakeland engineer and undecided Republican. "Betty Castor was talking about no tax cuts for the rich, but I don't know what she means by 'rich.'"

Reporter Brad Smith can be reached at (813) 259-7365.

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#### **GRAPHIC: PHOTO**

Tribune photo by VICTOR JUNCO Stacie Schaible of WFLA, Channel 8, gives Amber Davis, of Tampa, the floor Monday at the WUSF, Channel 16, studio, where a voter panel watched the debate on



TV and discussed it. Most said they learned little about the candidates.

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